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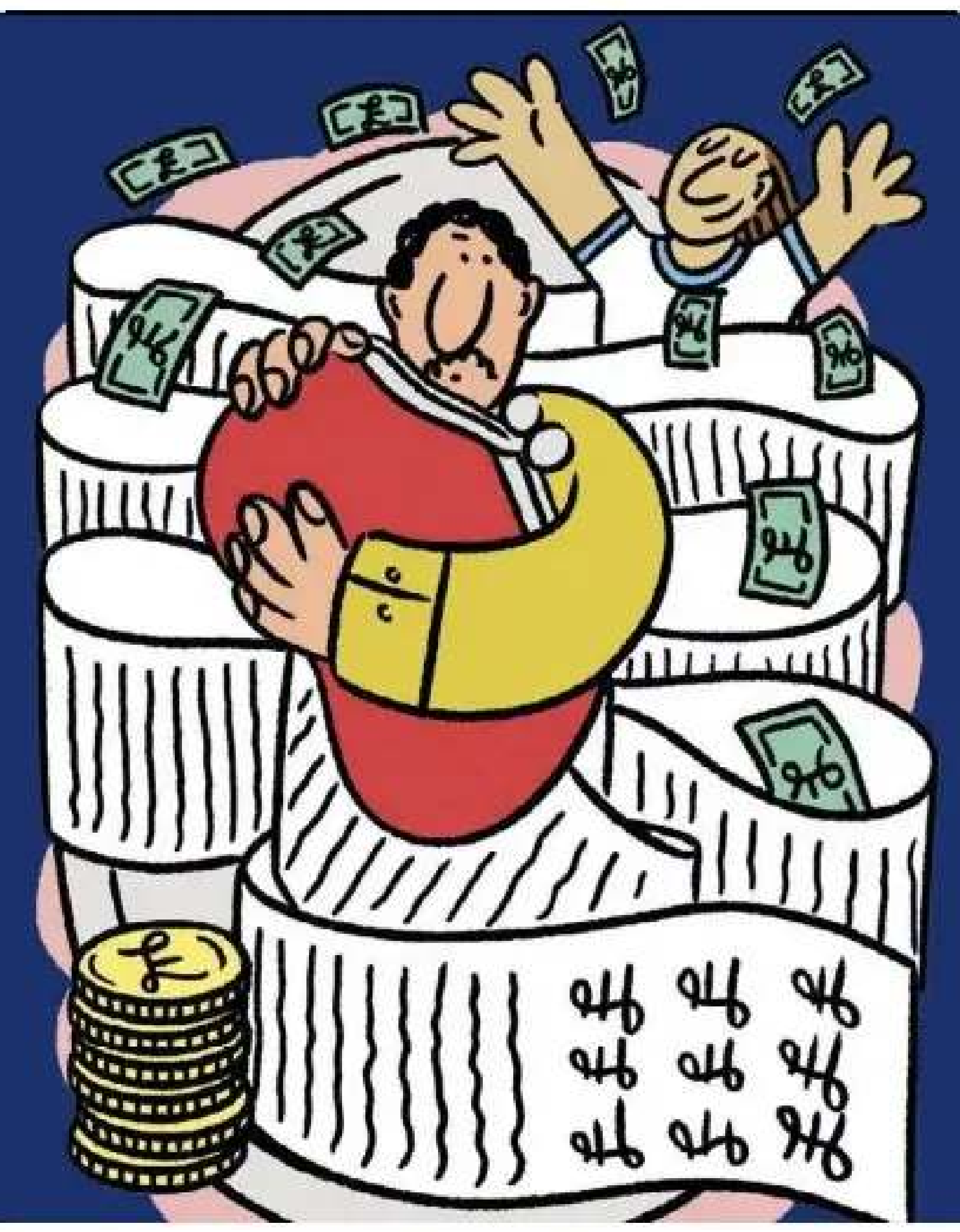

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Burnham pledges to get all rough sleepers off streets by Christmas

Kiran Stacey
Policy editor

Andy Burnham has urged local leaders to offer all rough sleepers in England a route off the streets by Christmas, as he pledges another £100m to end street homelessness.

Telling the Guardian that rough sleeping has become so common he worried it now “feels like part of the scenery”, the prime minister promised he would mount a Covid-style campaign to get everyone off the streets this winter.

The announcement solidifies tackling homelessness as a central policy for Burnham’s government, and gives voters a measure by which to judge his success - although without a concrete target for ministers to hit.

Homelessness campaigners welcomed the move, but warned more will need to be done to tackle the longer-term temporary accommodation crisis, which has given the UK the worst homelessness problem in the western world.

In his article for the Guardian website, Burnham writes: “We see people bedded down in doorways and sat outside stations, carrying their lives in rucksacks and sleeping bags on their backs. And I think most people have the same reaction: this isn’t right. It shouldn’t be happening here. But we’ve lived with it for so long that something that used to shock us now feels like part of the scenery.”

He adds: “We did it in the pandemic. We got people out of the cold because, as a country, we decided it had to be done. We can do it again.

“That’s why the first thing I announced when I became prime minister was a commitment to end rough sleeping. Not to manage it, not to reduce it - but to end it. And today, we’re taking the first step in getting it done. We’re putting £442m behind a national drive to get everyone in for Christmas.”

Burnham announced his drive to end rough sleeping outside No 10 immediately after becoming prime minister, pledging £340m over the next three years to provide more accommodation for rough sleepers.

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Sister act Williams sisters in first doubles outing since 2022

Sport, page 36

& Southern
al Group

▶ ***Fans were delighted to see 14-time grand slam champion pair on court, although game ended in defeat***

PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT STUART/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Ulez led to lung boost for children in London

Damien Gayle
Environment correspondent

Children’s lungs grew bigger and stronger after the most polluting vehicles were restricted from entering London, a study has found.

Examinations of London schoolchildren before and after the introduction of the city’s ultra-low emission zone (Ulez) found a restoration of lung capacity that had been stunted by exposure to pollution.

Researchers said the findings were a vindication of Ulez, which had been criticised as a burden on motorists.

“Traffic pollution in cities damages children’s health and development,” said Chris Griffiths, a professor of primary care at the University of Oxford and Queen Mary University of London, the study’s joint senior author.

“We provide the strongest evidence yet on how these harms can be prevented. Ambitious clean-air zones should be considered a priority for cities globally with traffic-related air pollution.”

Air pollution from traffic has stunted the development of children’s lungs in London for decades. Previous research

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Meta sued by 29 states in landmark trial in US

Dara Kerr

Lawyers representing 29 US states have accused Meta of covering up internal research that showed Instagram was addictive for teenagers.

In a packed courtroom on the opening day of a landmark legal challenge, they said the company knew its products harmed children but hid that information from the public.

In her opening statement yesterday, California’s deputy attorney general, Megan O’Neill, told jurors that she would be giving them a preview of what they could expect to see over the course of the trial, which would include testimony from expert witnesses and Meta employees, along with internal documents that the attorneys general uncovered while investigating the company.

She referenced an internal 2019 survey and other documents including one that said “the young ones are the best ones”. In another document, Meta stated: “Teens are hooked despite how it makes them feel. Instagram is addictive.”

“They knew,” O’Neill said. “Time and again,

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The Grenfell wall in west London commemorating the 72 people who died as a result of the fire, among them 18 children. Police have yet to bring charges against anyone over the 2017 tragedy
PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN TALLIS/AFP/GETTY

Grenfell cladding firm paid £23m more to shareholders than victims

Jessica Murray
Social affairs correspondent

The company behind Grenfell Tower's flammable cladding gave more compensation to its shareholders than to victims of the disaster, an investigation has found.

Arconic, which made and sold the cladding panels found to be the "primary cause" of the rapid spread of the Grenfell fire, paid $74m (£55m) to its shareholders for economic losses they incurred after the blaze.

In contrast, the company paid $43m (£32m) to the estates of the fire's victims and survivors after a lengthy legal battle. Across both payouts, all but $2m was covered by Arconic's insurers.

The findings are part of a report by the thinktank Common Wealth and the financial investigations group Find, which calls for stronger corporate accountability laws in England and Wales to ensure future misconduct does not go "unpunished and undeterred".

"Arconic successfully avoided consequential accountability for its role in the fire through a series of ordinary business practices," the report said.

Grenfell United, which represents the bereaved and survivors of the fire, said the investigation showed how "corporate structures and legal systems have allowed those responsible to move on while our community continues to live with the consequences".

"Grenfell was not just a tragedy – it was a preventable disaster. We hope these findings help drive the legal and political changes needed to ensure no company can evade responsibility in this way again," they said.

A total of 72 people, including 18 children, died as a result of the fire in the 24-storey Grenfell Tower in June 2017.

Arconic sold Reynobond PE, the flammable aluminium composite material (ACM) used to clad the tower. The inquiry into the blaze found the company "deliberately and dishonestly concealed from the market" the true danger of the product in the form in which it was used on Grenfell. Arconic has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, and a criminal investigation by the Metropolitan police has yet to bring charges against any individuals or companies in relation to the fire.

> *'Arconic avoided consequential accountability for the fire through ordinary business practices'*
>
> **Report by Common Wealth and Find**

The report revealed how the Reynobond PE used on the tower's cladding made up less than 1% of annual Reynobond sales at the time, and said there was no evidence Arconic had tried to trace the rest of the product it had sold.

It had been selling Reynobond globally for at least 20 years before the Grenfell fire, and previously said it had sold 12.75m sq metres of it in total.

The report urged Arconic to publicly reveal where the rest of the material was sold, and said it should be debarred from public contracts in England until it does so.

Leela Jadhav, a Common Wealth researcher and the report's author, said the findings "outline a near-total failure of legal mechanisms to hold corporations accountable".

It also called for stronger laws in England to punish corporate misconduct, saying the country lags far behind others in doing this.

Its recommendations included making punitive damages available in England and Wales in cases where corporate illegality was implicated in death. Currently, these damages are awarded very rarely and only in narrowly defined circumstances.

Courts should be given the power to direct a portion of shareholder settlement recoveries to victim funds where third-party harm is identified, it said, and insurance companies should conduct human rights and environmental due diligence to ensure they do not "facilitate and encourage" misconduct.

The UK government has committed a maximum of £5.1bn to cladding removal, with £600m of public money put into the ACM Cladding Remediation Fund. The report said "an order of punitive damages against Arconic could cover these expenses, at no public cost".

Arconic declined to comment.

Watchdog asked to look into firms with links to Reform

Aletha Adu
Political correspondent

The Gambling Commission has been urged to investigate claims that companies linked to Reform UK donors and allies of Nigel Farage have been operating without a licence.

Bridget Phillipson, the Labour party's chair, has written to the watchdog asking it to look into Tether.bet, a Montenegro-based gambling company, and Fispay, a UK company owned by Reform's data protection officer, Mowbray Jackson.

It comes after the Sunday Times reported both companies had been operating without a licence. It is against the law to provide gambling facilities without a licence in the UK under the Gambling Act 2005.

The cryptobillionaire Christopher Harborne's £5m gift to Farage is already under scrutiny by the parliamentary commissioner for standards.

George Cottrell, a convicted fraudster and long-term ally of Farage, is linked to Tether.bet, which issued a closure notice on its website on 12 August.

Jackson told the Sunday Times his company "exclusively" brokered private jet travel and had never provided facilities for gambling, while Cottrell said he was a customer of Tether.bet and he had "never solicited clients for any betting company".

In her letter, Phillipson wrote: "In light of these allegations, I would urge the commission to investigate:

- Whether Tether.bet, and its operators, provided or advertised remote gambling facilities to consumers in UK without the required licence.
- Whether Fispay Ltd, or any other UK company, provided or supported gambling facilities or services to consumers in the UK without the required licence."

Phillipson added: "These are the latest allegations in a mountain of unanswered questions concerning Reform's donors and finances. Nigel Farage cannot dodge them forever. He needs to stop making excuses and come clean with the public."

The Sunday Times published an investigation into links between Reform funders and Tether.bet.

The newspaper said Cottrell was a high-profile customer of the website, and Harborne owned a company, IFX, that processed payments on behalf of another company that took deposits and returned winnings.

Cottrell's lawyers told the newspaper his relationship with Tether.bet "has been limited to that of a customer, in addition to which he knows and is friends with the owner".

George Cottrell, a Nigel Farage ally, has been linked to Tether.bet

When contacted by the Guardian, Cottrell's lawyers said he was one of the world's best-known professional gamblers. "It is therefore hardly surprising that [others] may seek to associate themselves with him in an attempt to lend credibility to their businesses or generate publicity. Mr Cottrell has never invested in, owned or operated any betting company or casino. He has never solicited clients for any betting company or casino. Any suggestion that he was involved in unlawful gambling activity is wholly false."

Harborne and IFX's representatives told the Sunday Times he had never had any role in the running and operations of IFX and that it "operates in accordance with applicable regulations and legislation across the markets it supports".

After Farage's Clacton byelection victory, parliament's standards commissioner reopened an investigation into whether he should have declared a series of gifts made to him shortly before the last general election.

The sound of silence

Drinkers toast pubs' ban on noisy phone calls and music

Helena Horton

The terrace of the Moon Under Water, the Wetherspoons pub on London's Leicester Square, was full of people enjoying the warm weather and chatting – without a TikTok video or speakerphone call in earshot.

At Wetherspoons, the convivial atmosphere can no longer be punctured by rude customers taking phone calls at full blast or playing videos without headphones after Tim Martin, the owner of the pub chain, banned both actions on his premises.

Gary and Mark, two brothers who were catching up over pints, both thought anyone playing noise in the pub should be barred.

"There is no way anyone should be allowed to be obnoxious enough to have their phone on loud" said Mark. "Why should people choose to play music that I don't like and that other people around them don't like? I listen to music with headphones on, in a private way."

But Gary pointed out: "First they didn't used to allow televisions in Wetherspoons but now they have TVs with the sound on. External noise is becoming part of the pub."

Abdslam Elidrisi, 65, who was puffing on a cigar with a glass of white wine while people-watching, also welcomed the move.

"I come here because I am a member of a film club nearby and they don't let me smoke my cigar, so I visit here to smoke it and watch the world go by," he said. "Music is a personal thing, so I agree with Mr Martin. You can't impose it on other people. Loud phone calls are the same thing. I don't want to hear about your personal life – unless you are having a conversation with me about it!"

▲ *The clampdown on music and calls on loudspeaker mode is in effect across all 792 Wetherspoons pubs* PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHEW HORWOOD/GETTY

The company announced it had introduced the ban across its 792 pubs, saying noise from smartphones and tablets had become an "increasing problem in recent years".

Martin said: "In a world dominated by other people's music and amplified sound, Wetherspoon pubs are an oasis of tranquillity and contemplation. We are kindly asking phone users to pipe down."

The pub company has recently been clamping down on some very modern behaviours including banning the use of Meta's "spy glasses" which contain very small cameras that enable the wearer to discreetly film.

▲ *Lily and Avril agreed it was antisocial to play music or videos and field phone calls over loudspeaker in a pub* PHOTOGRAPH: SARAH LEE/THE GUARDIAN

◀ *'First they didn't allow televisions in Wetherspoons but now they have TVs with the sound on,' noted Gary at the branch in Leicester Square*

Lily, 21, and Avril, 22, both students, agree it is antisocial and inconsiderate to play videos and phone calls out loud in the pub, but say they aren't regularly troubled by it when visiting Wetherspoons for chicken burgers and spritzes. "I've seen it on the train," Avril said.

Trev and John, who work laying telecoms cables, were enjoying a quiet after-work pint. "I think it's a great idea," said Trev, "People have loud speakerphone conversations right next to you and you can't enjoy your pint. In a pub, you don't want that. I take my phone calls outside."

Over at the Montagu Pyke, the Wetherspoons near Tottenham Court Road, not everyone had got the memo.

"Someone was doing it just now, taking a loud call on speakerphone. It annoys me and it is inconsiderate," said Mel Burton, 41, who had just finished a late pub lunch. Her colleague, Sam Reid, 48, was supportive of the ban. "It does piss me off when people play music out of their phones," he said. "I don't want to hear someone else's music."

The manager of the Montagu Pyke says she has had to tell people to turn off the speaker on their phones on a number of occasions. "It annoys me, it annoys other customers," she said. "I have to ask them to stop. If it's been banned by the whole company it means it must be an issue across the different Wetherspoons. Some people understand when we ask them to turn off the noise – others are looking for a fight."

Holly and Eleanor, both 18, were enjoying a meal after a day of shopping in London, having come down from Darlington on the train. "We saw this happening on the train this morning, someone was on their phone playing music out loud," said Holly. Eleanor added: "I agree with banning it in pubs. It's loud and annoying. It should be banned on the train as well."

London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, rolled out a campaign last year encouraging people to use headphones when playing music on the city's transport network.

Ikea to launch reselling platform in UK for its secondhand goods

Sarah Butler

Ikea is taking on eBay, Facebook Marketplace and Vinted with its own secondhand selling site in the UK.

The new platform, which will enable shoppers signed up to the Swedish company's membership scheme to connect directly to buy and sell pre-owned Ikea items locally, is scheduled to launch in the next few months.

The move by the world's largest furniture retailer follows its trials of online secondhand marketplaces in Spain and Norway and comes five years after it began buying and selling used Ikea items in some of its UK stores.

A spokesperson said: "Our goal is to make passing on beloved Ikea pieces as seamless as possible. We're creating a trusted and vibrant space to make it quick and easy for our Ikea Family [loyalty scheme] members to trade directly with one another."

Ikea is set to announce further details of the UK site in the coming months. On the Spanish site, selling is made easier with pre-filled product descriptions and price suggestions provided by Ikea. The retailer also offers sellers 15% extra on the price of the item sold if they agree to be paid in the form of an Ikea gift card.

Buyers in Spain – where a Poäng armchair is being sold for €56 (£48), less than half the price of a new version – will have to pay a 5% "protection fee" from January to fund costs related to the sale, in a similar system to that operated by Vinted.

Britons are embracing secondhand buying, pushing up sales at Vinted, which began as a clothes resale site but is now expanding into homewares and electronics. Other popular outlets include Facebook marketplace, Gumtree and smaller, more upmarket sites such as Vinterior.

The US secondhand site eBay recently bought the UK fashion seller Depop for $1.2bn (£887m).

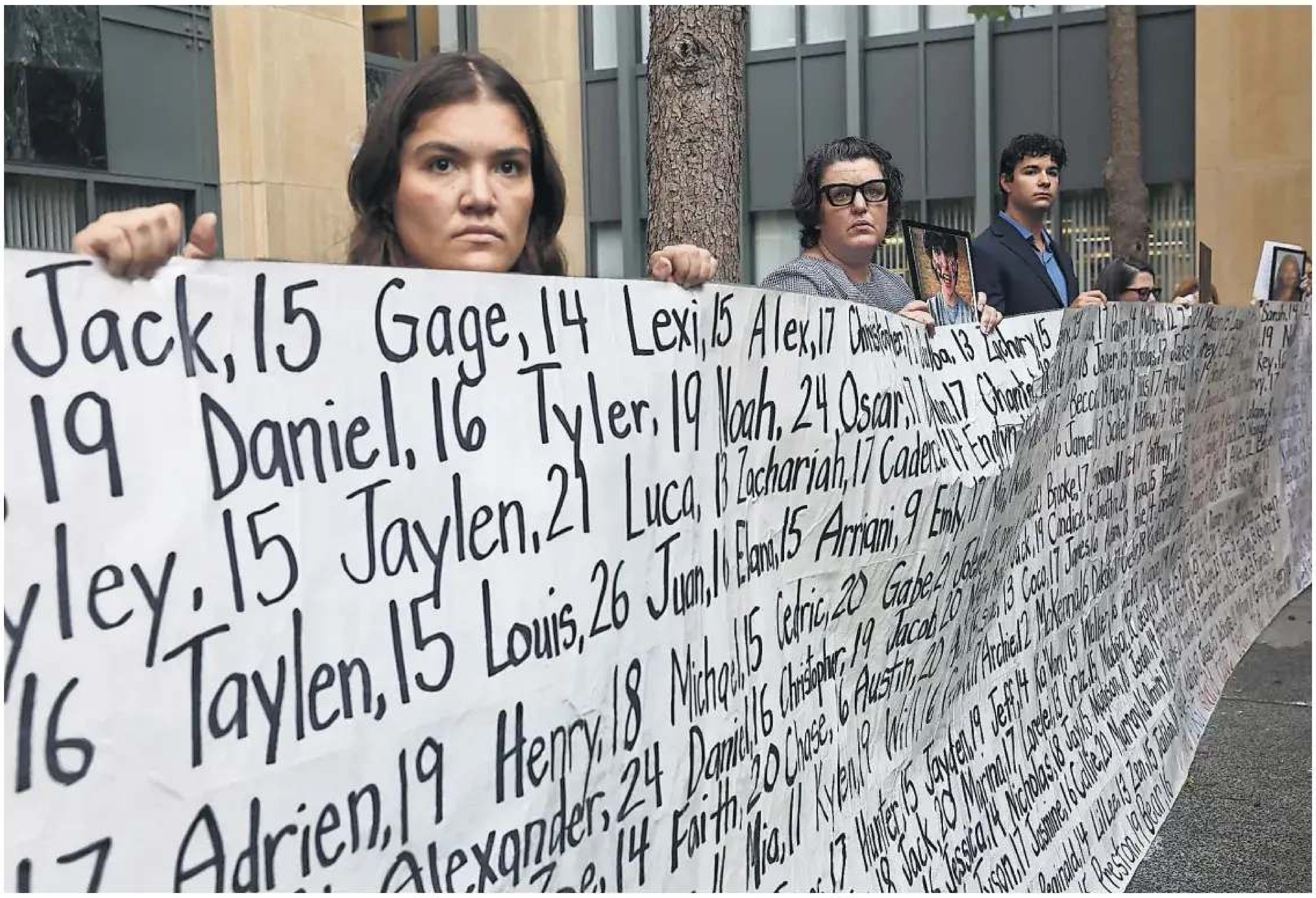
▲ *Members of Ikea's loyalty scheme will buy and sell items on the new site*

Secondhand items now make up about a 10th of global fashion sales.

There is heavy competition for the secondhand market as the trend has moved into the mainstream with the electrical goods retailers Currys and AO selling such items. AO cemented its position with the purchase of the phone seller MusicMagpie in 2024.

That has added to pressure on charity retailers, such as the British Heart Foundation, which has announced it will be closing 150 stores amid rising costs.

Ikea's move into secondhand items is partly motivated by its vow to become "climate positive" by 2030, including the aim to make all its products from renewable, recyclable and recycled materials.



US states claim Meta knew its social media harmed children

Continued *from page 1*

profits won. If you aren't paying for the product, you are the product. Kids are a product, and Meta took their data and used it."

The unprecedented lawsuit against Meta accuses Instagram and Facebook's parent company of deliberately designing addictive products that lure in young people and damage their mental health.

The jury trial is taking place in federal court in Oakland, California, and is expected to last between six and eight weeks. The jury will hear from Meta's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, the head of Instagram, Adam Mosseri, and an employee turned whistleblower, Arturo Béjar.

The 233-page lawsuit, first filed in October 2023, alleges that Meta regularly collects data on children under the age of 13 without parental permission, in violation of federal and state laws. The lawmakers claim in court documents that Meta "refuses to abandon its use of known harmful features" and that its motives are based solely on profit to "maximise its financial gains".

The suit was filed jointly by 29 state attorneys general in what is known as multidistrict litigation, though the trial proceedings will be led by attorneys for California, along with lawyers representing Colorado, Kentucky and New Jersey.

The sweeping legal proceedings could have profound consequences for the social media company. The attorneys general say that if Meta is found liable, damages could be as high as $200bn (£173bn) – an amount equivalent to its 2025 annual revenue. The lawmakers are also asking that Meta be compelled to change the design of its products to make them safer for children, which may have longer-term effects than a fine.

Meta denies all allegations. A company spokesperson said in a statement: "Rather than sticking to the facts or the law, the states have instead decided to chase an outlandish payout.

"The state AGs may call this a landmark case, but their limited claims are unsubstantiated and their financial demands are vastly disproportionate. The AGs offer no proof anyone in their states was misled, claim benign features like having an additional Instagram account somehow harmed their residents, and attempt to penalise Meta for industry-wide challenges like age verification."

The attorneys general disagree, saying Meta "developed and refined a set of psychologically manipulative" features designed to maximise people's time on its apps. Those include an infinite scrolling recommendation algorithm, constant notification alerts, thumbs-up "likes", and visual filters for altering one's image.

The lawmakers say young people are especially vulnerable to falling prey to such features and that excessive time online can lead to increased depression, anxiety, eating disorders and other mental health issues.

Internal research conducted by Meta is expected to be presented at the trial, including, for instance, a survey of 2,500 teens conducted in 2019. "Young people are acutely aware that Instagram can be bad for their mental health, yet are compelled to spend time on the app for fear of missing out on cultural and social trends," the results read.

The federal trial comes just two weeks after a judge ordered Meta to pay $567m to New Mexico in a similar case brought by the state's attorney general. This was the second court-ordered financial penalty for Meta in New Mexico, bringing the total it is responsible for paying the state to $942m. A state trial in Tennessee is also now under way.

Families, school districts and other attorneys general have brought thousands of lawsuits against Meta and other social media firms in recent years. The plaintiffs hope a death-by-a-thousand-cuts legal strategy will induce Meta to change its social networks to be safer for children.

In California, thousands of coordinated cases have been filed in state court against Meta, YouTube, TikTok and Snap. Meta and YouTube lost the first of those cases to go to trial in February, being ordered to pay $6m to the young claimant who brought the suit. (TikTok and Snap settled.) Two more lawsuits set to go to trial this summer, one federal and one in California state court, also settled for undisclosed sums.

The lawsuits have borrowed from the legal approach used against tobacco firms in the 1990s, which focused on cigarettes' addictive qualities and the makers' knowledge that their products caused harm. Those thousands of suits resulted in a $200bn payout by the four largest firms in 1998 and also enforced changes to their marketing practices.

▲ *Names of young people whose deaths were linked to social media use outside the trial, where Mark Zuckerberg is expected to appear*

PHOTOGRAPH: MANUEL ORBEGOZO/REUTERS

Analysis

Aisha Down

Real peril for tech giants – but it seems to be the algorithm, not their vast profits, in the spotlight

The start of the trial against Meta yesterday could spell the "end of social media as we know it", some analysts have said. But past cases cast some doubt on how far the litigation is likely to go.

In a bellwether case earlier this year, a jury in LA found the social media company – and YouTube, its co-defendant – liable for deliberately designing an addictive product that had deleterious effects on the mental health of a single young claimant. That case, which awarded the claimant $6m (£4.4m), opened the door for this and other litigation. At about the same time, Meta was forced to pay $942m after trials in New Mexico that focused on whether the company was aware of – and took measures to prevent – child sexual exploitation on its platforms.

This next wave of litigation will focus on the fundamental design of Meta's platform: the algorithm that underlies which content it shows to users.

Kate Winick, an analyst at Forrester, said the trial was "potentially the end of social media as we know it" and, while a ruling against Meta would not permanently kill the industry, it could "significantly reduce usage over the long term".

The figures that Meta and other social media companies could stand to pay are immense. The attorneys general are seeking $200bn in damages, the amount of revenue the company takes in a year. Meta has said in a court filing that they could amount to $1.4tn, which is just short of the company's market capitalisation. The judge in the case has called the company's estimation "unreasonable".

> *'I don't think anyone really wants to destroy Facebook. It's a valuable company and there would be so many bad outcomes'*

Perhaps a more realistic risk for the company is the potential for permanent changes to the way its social networks operate. Meta is essentially a digital advertising company. Its recommender algorithm ranks posts in users' feeds and fuels engagement in part by showing people posts that are likely to inflame emotion and keep them hooked. It is this algorithm that American attorneys general seem interested in changing, because it is this "dopamine-manipulating" feature – in the words of the lawsuit – that makes social media addictive. Changes to this algorithm may not alter how Facebook advertises, said Steven Murdoch, a professor at University College London, but they could reduce engagement, which could gravely reduce its advertising opportunities.

But all this depends on how big of a swing a US jury – and US regulators – are willing to take at the platform. "There's a plausible path" for global changes to the algorithm, said Murdoch. "But whether it's devastating or not – I'm not convinced things … are going to be devastating for the company."

Take the recent case of Google. US regulators sued in 2023 in a landmark antitrust case – which could have ended with authorities breaking up the company, perhaps forcing it to sell Chrome. Google lost the case but that extreme penalty wasn't imposed. It got away with what critics called a "slap on the wrist".

"I don't think anyone really wants to destroy Facebook. It's a valuable company and there would be so many bad outcomes," said Murdoch.

A Meta spokesperson said: "We stand by our record of creating strong protections for teens, and look forward to making our case in court."

Shrewd move
Mammal's snout grows to cope with winter
Page 8

Barking up wrong tree
Is it really the UK's unfriendliest town?
Page 17

National

Salmonella linked to imported eggs as one dies and 200 ill in outbreak

Denis Campbell
Health policy editor

One person has died and more than 200 others have fallen ill during a UK-wide outbreak of salmonella that health officials have linked to the consumption of imported eggs.

The 207 people affected so far range in age from less than a year old to 90, according to the UK Health Security Agency, which is leading an investigation into the outbreak.

The UKHSA has ruled out UK-produced eggs or poultry as the source and said the available evidence pointed to eggs imported into Britain. It is working with other European countries, through their joint system of surveillance of threats to health, to identify how the outbreak began.

The agency said it could not release any details about the person who had died or the circumstances of their death because this was the subject of a continuing investigation. It said a number of people were left so ill with salmonellosis - the illness caused by salmonella - that they had to be treated in hospital, and two of these people had a bloodstream infection.

Officials have ascertained through whole-genome sequencing that the 207 cases were all linked to a single strain of salmonella.

The first of the cases was identified on 11 August 2025, but most have only been identified since the middle of last month. Most of the cases have been in England (199), with six in Scotland and one each in Wales and Northern Ireland. London has seen 47 cases so far and Yorkshire and the Humber 38 cases.

UKHSA's notice alerting the public to the outbreak, which it issued yesterday morning, said: "Extensive epidemiological and food chain investigations are ongoing to identify the source and origin of the contamination responsible for illness."

Interviews with 114 of those left ill have identified "five food businesses where two or more independent cases reported attending in the week prior to symptom onset. These food businesses link 24 cases in total." The agency did not name the five businesses.

The UKHSA added: "Food chain investigations to date have identified that these premises are supplied by eggs from multiple sources, including egg importers. Local investigations have also identified possible cross-contamination risk events within two of these settings.

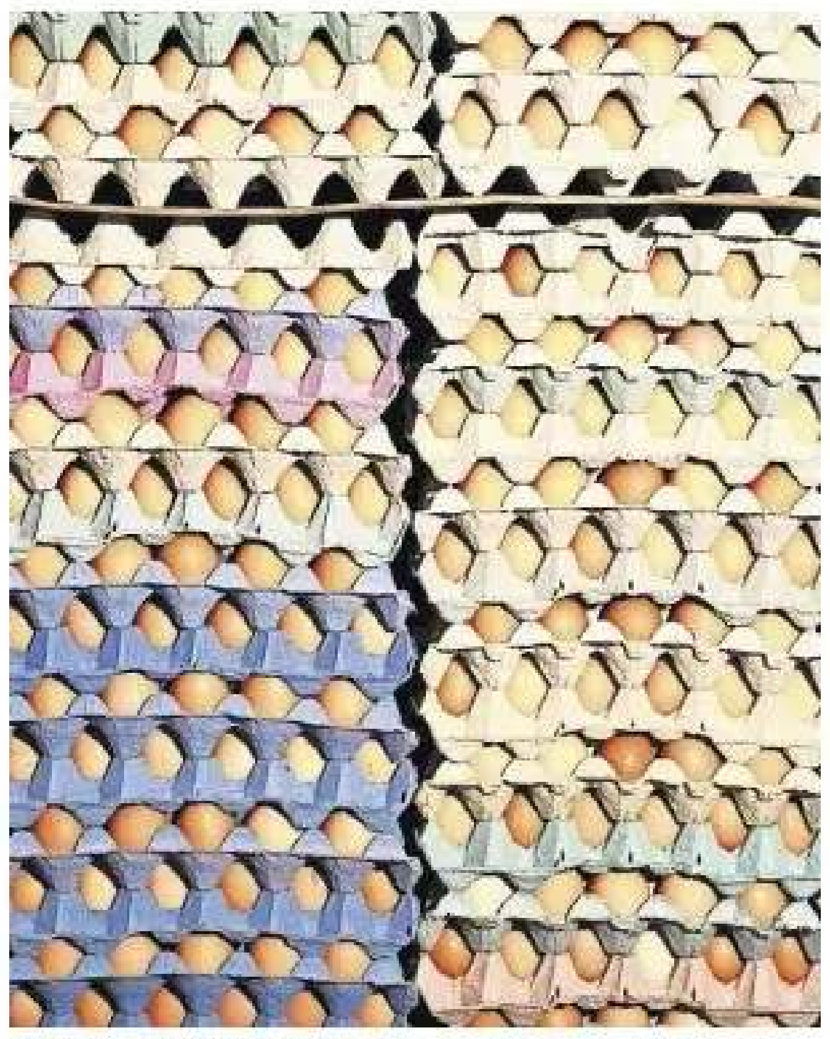
"At this time there is no identified link to UK-produced eggs or poultry."

Hannah Charles, UKHSA's lead epidemiologist for gastrointestinal infections, said: "We're working with Food Standards Agency and other public health agencies to investigate a salmonella outbreak that may be linked to eggs imported from outside of the UK.

"Salmonellosis is often caused by eating or handling contaminated food and can be spread rarely from person to person. Salmonella generally causes a mild illness, although vulnerable groups with weakened immune systems may experience more severe illness.

"Symptoms of a salmonella infection include diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes vomiting and fever. Anyone who is concerned about symptoms should contact their GP or out-of-hours service in the first instance."

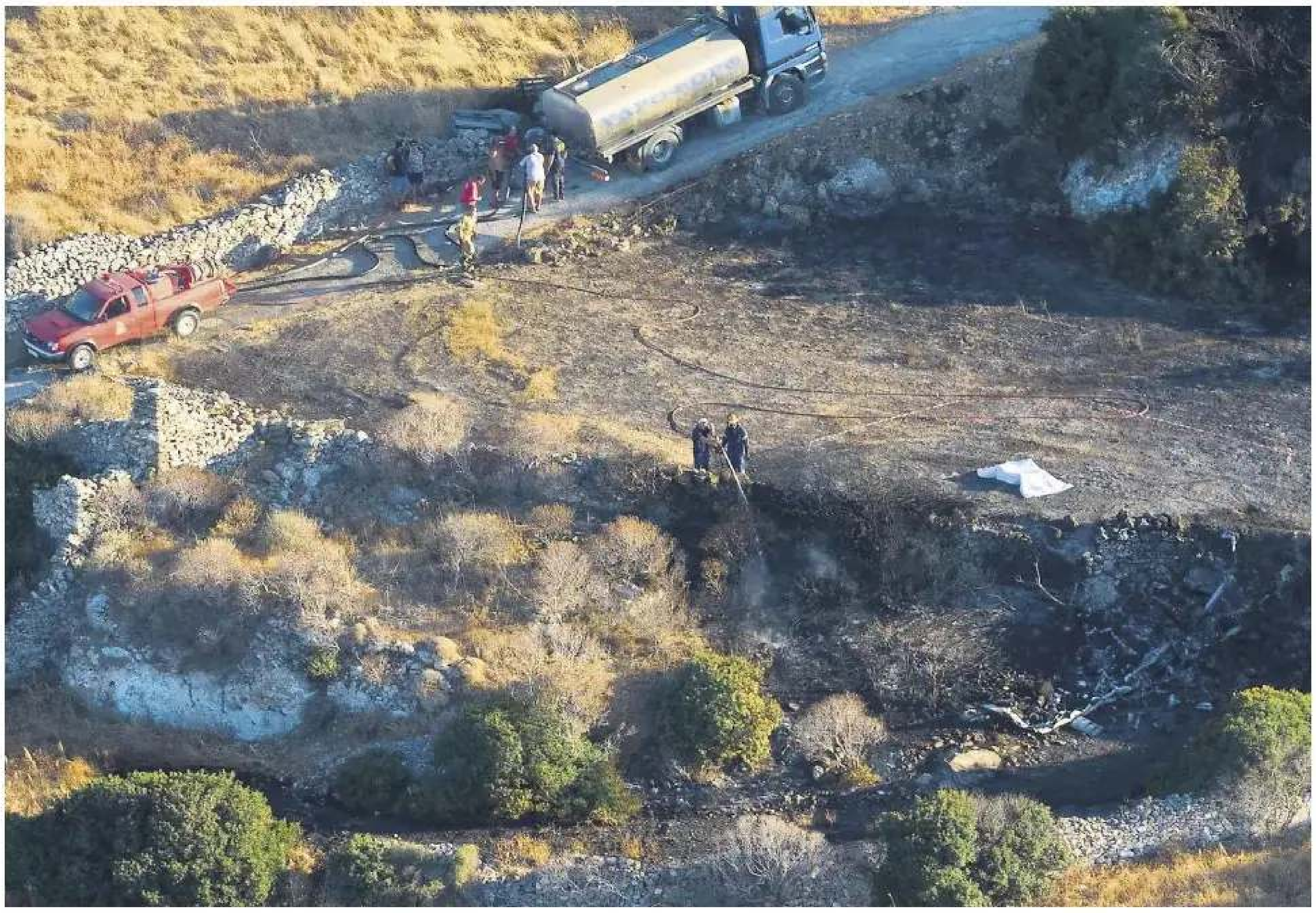
She advised the public to take action to prevent the spread of salmonella. "Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and before preparing and handling food, cook food thoroughly, and if you have any symptoms, avoid handling food for others where possible."



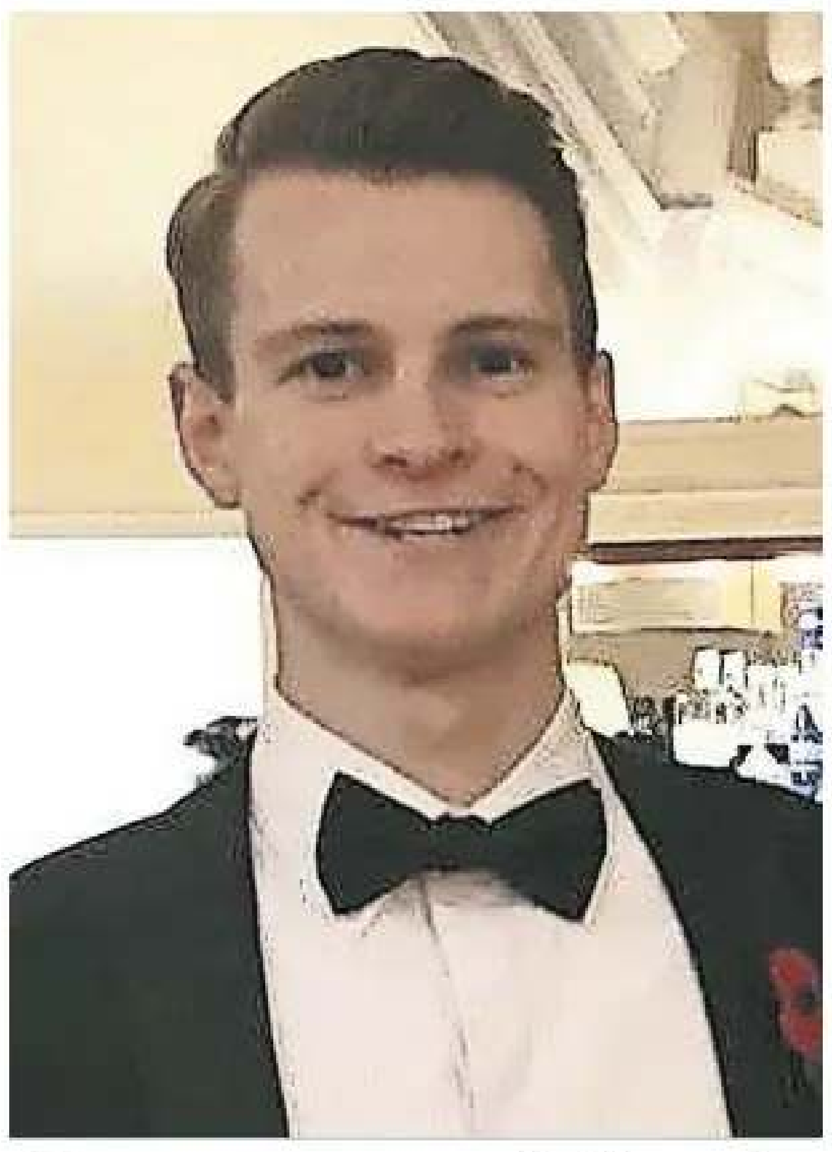
▲ *The UKHSA says it has not found a link to eggs produced domestically*

47

Cases identified in London, with 38 in Yorkshire and the Humber, out of a total of 207 so far across Britain



▲ *Emergency personnel work at the site of the helicopter crash on the island of Sifnos, south of Athens*
PHOTOGRAPH: REUTERS



Suspected fault on helicopter that crashed and killed newlyweds

Helena Smith
Athens

Greek police believe a mechanical fault may have caused a helicopter to crash moments before it was due to land on the island of Sifnos, killing a British couple on honeymoon and the pilot.

Authorities were focusing yesterday on the "strange noise" the aircraft, a privately chartered Bell 206, is reported to have made before falling to the ground and exploding on impact.

"We can confirm that two passengers, Marie Ebert and Alexander Cromie, died in the incident on Monday evening," a police officer said.

London-based Ebert and Cromie, aged 30 and 31 respectively, had selected Sifnos to spend their honeymoon after recently marrying.

Officials in Syros, the Aegean's administrative centre, identified the pilot as Giorgos Raikos, 53, saying he was a former air force officer and "extremely experienced".

One well-placed source said: "The focus of the inquiry is now on the helicopter and possible engine failure. What has happened is nothing short of a tragedy."

The deputy mayor of Sifnos, Manolis Fountolakis, told Greek TV: "People in the area have testified hearing the helicopter making a noise, a strange noise, probably a mechanical fault in the air and because the propeller was doing something strange."

CCTV footage is also being studied of the aircraft spiralling out of control as it approached the island's helipad near the village of Exambela.

The asset management company Blackstone, where Cromie worked as a vice-president in private wealth solutions, said in a statement issued to the Press Association: "We are shocked by the tragic passing of three people including our colleague Alex Cromie and his wife, Marie Ebert, who were celebrating their honeymoon.

"Alex was beloved by everyone who knew and worked with him at Blackstone, and our thoughts and prayers are with his loved ones."

The management consultants Bain & Company, where, according to her LinkedIn page, Ebert was a senior specialist, said: "We are shocked to read reports of a tragic accident in Greece regarding one of our colleagues and her husband. Our thoughts and support are with the families involved at this very difficult time."

Further tests were expected to be conducted on all three bodies to determine the precise cause of death.

The Greek transport ministry said the inquiry into the crash was being headed by the National Organisation for the Investigation of Air and Railway Accidents and Transport Safety.

By yesterday afternoon, Greece's civil aviation authority had reportedly recalled all Bell 206 helicopters until further notice.

Greece's public broadcaster, ERT, quoted Antonis Zambelis, a local resident, as saying: "The helicopter crashed about 50 metres away from houses with people inside and about 50 metres from the landing spot next to the Panayia tis Vrysis monastery."

Plumes of smoke engulfed the crash site after the helicopter ignited in a fireball. Rescue workers discovered the remains of all three victims.

Greece's ministry of infrastructure and transport was coordinating the inquiry yesterday as senior law enforcement officials converged on Sifnos.

Moscow threat of 'consequences' will not alter support for Ukraine from UK, says Burnham

Jamie Grierson
Rowena Mason

Andy Burnham says Britain will continue to "support Ukraine 100%" after Russia threatened consequences following strikes by UK-made drones.

The Russian embassy to the UK said on Monday that Britain had been deliberately escalating the Ukraine conflict and the deeper its involvement, "the higher the price it will pay".

Burnham, asked yesterday during a visit to Wolverhampton for his response to Moscow's threat, said: "This is the UK doing what it has long said it would do, which is to support Ukraine 100% against this illegal war led by Vladimir Putin.

"We are providing support so that Ukraine can defend itself, and that's been the British position all the way through this conflict by previous prime ministers. It remains the case with me. We are not fair-weather friends. We will be there in Ukraine's hour of need, and that won't change."

The use of the drones made by UK companies is part of Ukraine's "deep strike" campaign. However, it is not the first time Ukraine has deployed British-made equipment in Russia, having long used Storm Shadow missiles.

Kyiv has stepped up its attacks this year, with long-range missiles and swarms of drones increasingly targeting Russia's military industries and energy facilities. It has hit depots of Russia's largest online retailer, Wildberries, burning merchandise worth billions of pounds and bringing the war home to the Russian public more than four years into Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's embassy to the UK said on Monday the reports confirmed that "London is deliberately opting for an escalation of the Ukraine crisis", accusing Britain of "seeking to contain Russia and inflict maximum damage on it by proxy".

"London's actions will inevitably carry consequences for which it will have to answer," it said. "The deeper its involvement in the conflict and the greater its support for Kyiv's terrorist machinery, the higher the price it will pay."

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence said: "Britain stands shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine and we are committed to providing the equipment Ukraine needs to defend itself against Putin's illegal invasion. Russia should be in no doubt about the resolve of this government to stand against Russian aggression, in Ukraine and against the UK and our allies."

Ukraine's strategy of long-range drone strikes is thought to be intended to cut Moscow's revenue for the war and to make Russian civilians feel the impact of the invasion.

Kyiv launched three times as many such strikes in July as it did in January, according to data from Acled, an independent conflict monitor.

Repeatedly hitting deep into Russia has forced Moscow to stretch its air defences over a larger area. Russia's defence ministry said on Saturday it had shot down 598 Ukrainian drones over 19 Russian regions as well as the Black Sea, the Azov Sea and the annexed Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

Officials said on Monday that Ukrainian long-range attacks on Russia had killed seven people overnight, while five civilians died in Ukraine after strikes by Moscow's forces.

Russian missile attacks yesterday killed 10 people and injured eight in a village in Ukraine's north-eastern Kharkiv oblast, the regional governor said.

The strike on the village of Pechenihy damaged 10 private buildings, a cafe, a post office, a shop and at least seven cars, Oleh Syniehubov said on Telegram.

A rapid development of largely homegrown technologies, including the Flamingo cruise missile and the FP-1 long-range fixed-wing drone from Fire Point, have allowed Ukraine to bomb warehouses, oil refineries, ports and military facilities up to 1,500 miles (2,400km) from its border.

Ukraine can now almost match the deep-strike capability Russia has had since the beginning of the war using large drones and cruise missiles, though it does not possess the high-speed ballistic missiles Moscow frequently uses.

At the same time, both sides' air defences are stretched to the point of near exhaustion, leading to an increase in civilian casualties and worries that the impact of the conflict beyond the immediate frontlines will only increase into the winter.

Drone supply
Is Britain escalating the conflict?

Is the UK's drone supply actually an escalation?

Britain has been supplying weapons and providing financial support to Ukraine since before Russia's full-scale invasion. It has committed to providing £3bn a year in military aid until the end of the decade and to joining the EU's €90bn loan scheme, which bankrolls Kyiv's military effort.

The £100,000 Nyan drone is a medium-sized, jet-powered delta-wing drone capable of delivering relatively small attacks at distances greater than 150 miles. However, while it looks hi-tech, it is not a munition that appears to be militarily significant.

Britain has in the past supplied £1m-plus Storm Shadow missiles with a similar operating range that were used by Ukraine to launch attacks into Russia, but stocks have run short. Ukraine has developed and manufactures its own Flamingo cruise missiles and longer-range drones that it uses to attack Russia daily.

Why is Russia talking this up?

It is as good an opportunity as any for the Kremlin to make a political point. Western financial support is critical for Ukraine's war effort and anything that might undermine public confidence in countries such as the UK is, from Moscow's perspective, worth making.

Russia is also hurting economically from Ukraine's sustained "deep strike" campaign that has targeted oil refineries and, more recently, ecommerce distribution warehouses on the outskirts of Moscow. Attacks are taking place on a near-daily basis.

It is the first time that Ukraine has been able to hit targets in and around Moscow, more than 300 miles from its border, deploying a long-range capability that western leaders had refused to supply until Kyiv developed it for itself.

Are there signs of a wider escalation by Russia?

Russia has been engaged in hostile behaviour towards the UK for years, including conducting two poisoning operations on British soil of defectors: Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006, and Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury in 2018. Russian hackers routinely target the UK, and regularly mount online disinformation campaigns.

However, as the war in Ukraine remains almost deadlocked, and as Kyiv strikes closer and closer to home, Russia has become more reckless across Europe. It has conducted arson attacks using incendiary devices hidden in DHL parcels, including in the UK; flown 20 drones into Poland; and conducted an aerial harassment campaign across the continent.

Moscow was almost certainly behind an attempt to attack Ukrainian cargo planes at Leipzig airport in Germany earlier this month with a small quadcopter drone armed with plastic explosive. It appears willing to spread the Ukraine war into Europe, including the UK. **Dan Sabbagh**

'Laughter kills fear'

The deathly humour of Ukraine's *yoblyk* videos

Luke Harding
Kyiv

To many observers, they will appear dehumanising and offensive. To many Ukrainians, they are a brutal reminder of the fate that awaits Russian soldiers in Vladimir Putin's invasion, as well as a potent propaganda weapon.

Over the past year and a half, videos of kamikaze drones chasing Russian service personnel to their deaths have become a distinctive genre on social media. They are the brainchild of Robert Brovdi, the head of Ukraine's unmanned systems forces and founder of "Magyar's Birds", named after his call sign.

Brovdi's 414th aviation strike brigade has pioneered the use of battlefield video, much of it recorded by first-person-view (FPV) drones. The death videos are known as *yoblyks*, a portmanteau that combines the root of the Ukrainian word for "fuck" with an affectionate diminutive form. The closest English translation is probably "fuckling".

Early each morning, a military editor known by his call sign, Catman, sifts through battlefield clips recorded the previous day, selecting some for a two-minute compilation and adding pulsing or mystical music. A longer online reel is titled "Yoblyks of the Week".

▼ *Ukrainian personnel prepare a Chaklun strike drone for operations against Russian positions in Crimea*
PHOTOGRAPH: DAN BASHAKOV/AP PHOTO

Defending his work, Catman said the videos played an important role in demoralising ordinary Russians and revealing the true cost of the Kremlin's unprovoked war. "My goal is to show Russians that if they mobilise in Ukraine they will be killed, that it's a one-way ticket and death is waiting for them," he said.

He acknowledged that the clips were deliberately arranged to mock the victims, who are sometimes seen throwing sticks at the drones to try to knock them off-course, or falling over as they run. Though the moment of their death is not shown, the last frame is a close-up of a soldier's face.

"We have a phrase: laughter kills fear," Catman said. "Our main task is to laugh at these enemies and to depict them as helpless. This boosts the morale of our forces. It's impossible for me to feel sorry for them. It's war, after all, not a movie."

Typically, the Russian soldiers are killed while walking or travelling by motorbike to the frontline. Some were unaware they were at risk from drones, Catman said, and appeared to have been tricked by their commanders.

DEMONTAGE
REPORT OF USF GROUPING
37 182
14 664
89 293

▼▼ *The clips of kamikaze drone attacks boost morale and demoralise the Russian enemy, Ukrainians say*
PHOTOGRAPH: ALESSIO MAMO/THE GUARDIAN

"Their training is short. A lot die just two weeks after enlisting," he said.

Catman described most of the soldiers as "banal donkey men" ordered to carry provisions or fuel to exposed Russian positions. Others drag communication cables. Since February, when Elon Musk shut down his satellite internet service Starlink in Russia, officers in the rear have struggled to contact frontline units.

Another member of Magyar's Birds said there was compelling evidence the Russians were routinely misled about the dangers. "You can see from the videos a lot of them are not even hiding," he said. "They use their radio sets. A large number are fooled by the lie that everything will be OK, that they are going to their positions and are totally safe."

The brigade has an archive of about 3,600 videos. Only two feature women, both wearing combat uniform and carrying assault rifles. "There is no difference for me. They are all enemies," Catman said.

The videos play an important part in verifying Russian losses, which are running at more than 30,000 soldiers a month killed or injured, according to Kyiv.

Brovdi said he had no qualms about publishing material that many in the west might find distasteful and morally dubious. "God forbid they should ever experience pain. Because those of us in Ukraine who have experienced real physical pain from war would never agree with that perspective," he said.

In daily posts, he uses language that some might find gratuitous, for instance describing Russians as "worms" pecked by "birds".

He said: "When the war started, everything changed. There was a desire to humiliate the enemy as much as possible, not with typical words but exotic ones. It was only natural that military technical folklore and coinages such as *yoblyk* found their way into my speech. They existed before AI."

The videos have led to several trolling subgenres. Some Russian women post photos of themselves saying farewell to their husbands as they leave to take part in what Putin calls a "special military operation". Ukrainians identify the men and subsequently reply with drone footage showing their deaths.

According to Catman, the *yoblyks* have a wide audience, including inside Russia. "There is very little information there about soldiers who go missing," he said. "Some people search and take screenshots. Mothers or wives then post messages saying something bad has happened to their loved ones."

Pro-war Russian bloggers post images on Telegram channels of Ukrainian soldiers dying in battle. Other videos show the killing of unarmed Ukrainian prisoners of war - a crime. The Russian internet includes AI-generated fakes that purport to show Ukrainian military personnel criticising their army leadership.

Anatolii Loza, a Ukrainian volunteer who was captured and imprisoned by Russia and recently swapped, said he saw nothing wrong with *yoblyks*. "International law doesn't apply to killing combatants on the field of battle," he said. "The Russians come to shoot our soldiers and civilians. They are wearing uniform. They deserve their fate."

Loza's wife, Olena, said attitudes inside Ukraine had hardened after spring 2022, when Russian forces killed hundreds of civilians in the cities of Bucha and Mariupol, leaving their bodies on the streets. Of *yoblyks*, she said: "I don't find these videos informative. I'm already furious with Russia."

At the headquarters of Magyar's Birds, Catman said black humour was essential during wartime. "It's important for our own people to say we are not just surviving. We need to show we are flourishing and hitting back hard against the enemy."

Kanye West

Rapper to play two shows in St Petersburg in October

Pjotr Sauer

Ye, the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, will perform two shows in St Petersburg this October, becoming the most well-known western star to play in Russia since its full invasion of Ukraine four years ago.

The artist has attracted controversy in recent years, with his antisemitic outbursts and expressions of sympathy towards nazism making some countries and venues uneasy about hosting his tour.

He is to perform on 10 and 11 October at St Petersburg's Gazprom Arena.

Russian fans rushed to secure tickets after the shows were announced on Monday. Nearly all of the most expensive tickets, costing upwards of $1,850, were snapped up within hours, according to the concerts' website. By the evening, the cheapest tickets, priced at about $105, had also sold out.

Ye had been rumoured to be planning a performance in Russia for some time. In 2024 he travelled to Moscow to attend the birthday celebrations of Gosha Rubchinskiy, the Russian fashion designer and a longtime collaborator with the rapper.

As well as a series of antisemitic remarks, Ye has drawn outrage through his embrace of Nazi imagery, selling T-shirts bearing swastikas and releasing a song titled Heil Hitler.

He has since tried to rehabilitate his image, taking out a full-page advert in the Wall Street Journal apologising for his antisemitic behaviour and discussing his struggles with mental health. "I am not a Nazi or an antisemite," he wrote. "I love Jewish people."

Ye has faced resistance to performing in several European countries, with concerts in the UK, France and Italy cancelled and calls elsewhere for him to be barred. However, a record-breaking concert in Istanbul drew 118,000 fans, while 70,000 came to watch him in Tbilisi. Earlier this month, he performed a sold-out show in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

His St Petersburg dates are also likely to draw pushback within Russia, where conservative activists have increasingly sought to sever ties with western cultural influence, and expressions of support for nazism can carry lengthy prison sentences.

The politician Nikolay Novichkov has called for an investigation into Ye's past remarks praising Hitler. He told the Russian outlet Ostorozhno Novosti the concerts should be cancelled unless the singer publicly expressed "moral support for Russia and the special military operation".

Ye's visit could nevertheless offer a propaganda coup, bolstering the Kremlin's efforts to show that Russia remains connected to the outside world despite sweeping sanctions and calls for cultural boycotts.

Authors urge Burnham to cut business rates on bookshops

Emma Loffhagen

Maggie O'Farrell, Philip Pullman, Katherine Rundell and Elif Shafak are among the authors supporting a campaign by independent booksellers who have urged Andy Burnham to extend business rates relief for pubs, clubs and live music venues to bookshops, warning that rising bills could put some at risk of closure.

A total of 234 independent booksellers have signed an open letter organised by the Booksellers Association, calling on the prime minister and the chancellor to treat bookshops the same as other businesses that play a positive role in their communities.

The government announced a 20% reduction in business rates last month for pubs, clubs and live music venues from April.

More than two dozen authors have told the Booksellers Association they support the letter, including the children's laureate, Patrice Lawrence, Adam Kay, Lemn Sissay, Anthony Horowitz, Patrick Ness, Donna Ashworth and Rachel Joyce.

The letter, sent last week, states that bookshops were "deeply disappointed" to learn they would not be included in the additional relief.

"The government has accepted that businesses which deliver significant community benefit deserve targeted support," the letter said. "Bookshops clearly meet that test."

It added: "Business rates relief for bookshops would also provide a meaningful legacy for the National Year of Reading. The government is rightly telling the country that reading matters. But as things stand, its legacy risks being contradictory: promoting reading on the one hand while implementing policies that reduce investment in bookshops and may contribute to their closure on the other."

O'Farrell, the author of Hamnet, said: "Independent bookshops are the beating hearts of our high streets and communities. They need all the support we can give them."

◀ *The Hamnet author Maggie O'Farrell is one of the authors who is calling for rates relief for bookshops*

Rundell said: "To lose [bookshops] from our high streets would be to chip away at our culture, and at our ability to access fresh thought and new ideas."

The Treasury has argued that bookshops receive support through permanently lower business rates multipliers and a £4.3bn package intended to limit increases in bills.

Analysis commissioned from the economic consultancy Cebr found that independent bookshops in England that are not eligible for full small business rates relief face an average annual increase of £4,563 by 2029-30, with some bills expected to double when transitional relief ends.

Across the sector, business rates receipts are projected to increase by 45% nominally. For the average independent bookshop, Cebr estimates this would require selling an extra 1,141 books a year to cover the cost.

The impact is already being felt, according to separate Booksellers Association research, with 85% of independent booksellers saying they are less likely to invest in stock, staffing, events or their premises as a result of business rates changes.

Too crowded for ewe? Farmers took hill ewes and male lambs to market at Lairg, Sutherland, yesterday. The annual event in the northern Highlands is renowned as one of the biggest sales of hill sheep in Europe with up to 20,000 animals traded each year.

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF J MITCHELL/ GETTY IMAGES

Man in court on manslaughter charge over dog-attack death

Raphael Boyd

A 55-year-old man has appeared in court charged with manslaughter over the death of a man who was bitten by a dog on a footpath in Wakefield.

Bradford magistrates court heard yesterday that James Judge was bitten by a dog belonging to Lee Ellis on Saturday afternoon after an apparent dispute between the two men about right of way.

West Yorkshire police said that they were called to reports of an altercation on the old train line footpath off Blacker Lane in the Calder Grove area of Wakefield at about 1.30pm, where Judge, 55, was found to have been bitten by a dog. He was taken to a hospital, but died of his injuries.

Ellis was arrested by police at the scene and formally charged with manslaughter and being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control, causing injury resulting in death. Appearing in Bradford magistrates court yesterday wearing a grey jumper and tracksuit, the father of two broke down in tears and spoke only to confirm his name and address.

The district judge, Mark Daley, bailed Ellis until his next appearance at Leeds crown court on 16 September, on the condition he sleeps every night at his home address.

Rob Fones, representing Ellis, said there was "a verbal altercation in regards to right of way" and, despite not being asked to enter pleas, informed the court that the case would go to trial.

The court also heard that while an initial postmortem examination had been conducted, it had been unable to determine the exact number of dog bites that Judge sustained before dying. Ellis's dog, a German shepherd, has been seized as part of the investigation.

Some shrewd shrews can increase snout size in winter, scientists say

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

Humans turn to heated blankets and fluffy socks to cope with winter, but long-clawed shrews have a very different strategy: they increase the size of their snouts.

Researchers have previously discovered certain small mammals, including the common shrew, reversibly shrink their body mass, skull size, and brain mass in winter, with regrowth seen in the spring – a strategy called Dehnel's phenomenon.

Scientists now say they have documented similar changes in the long-clawed shrew, but the opposite trend occurs for the snout.

Writing in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B, Dr Yugo Ikeda, first author of the research from Toyo University in Japan and colleagues describe how they examined 136 skulls from long-clawed shrews, collected in Hokkaido between 1948 and 1988.

Tracking 16 measurements by month, they found several changed by month or season – and not in a uniform way.

Shrews collected over the winter season, between January and April, had a brain case height that was 12% smaller than that of younger shrews that were collected from August to September in their first year of life. However, the height of the snout, also known as the rostrum, was 7% larger and its width 6% greater for shrews collected in winter.

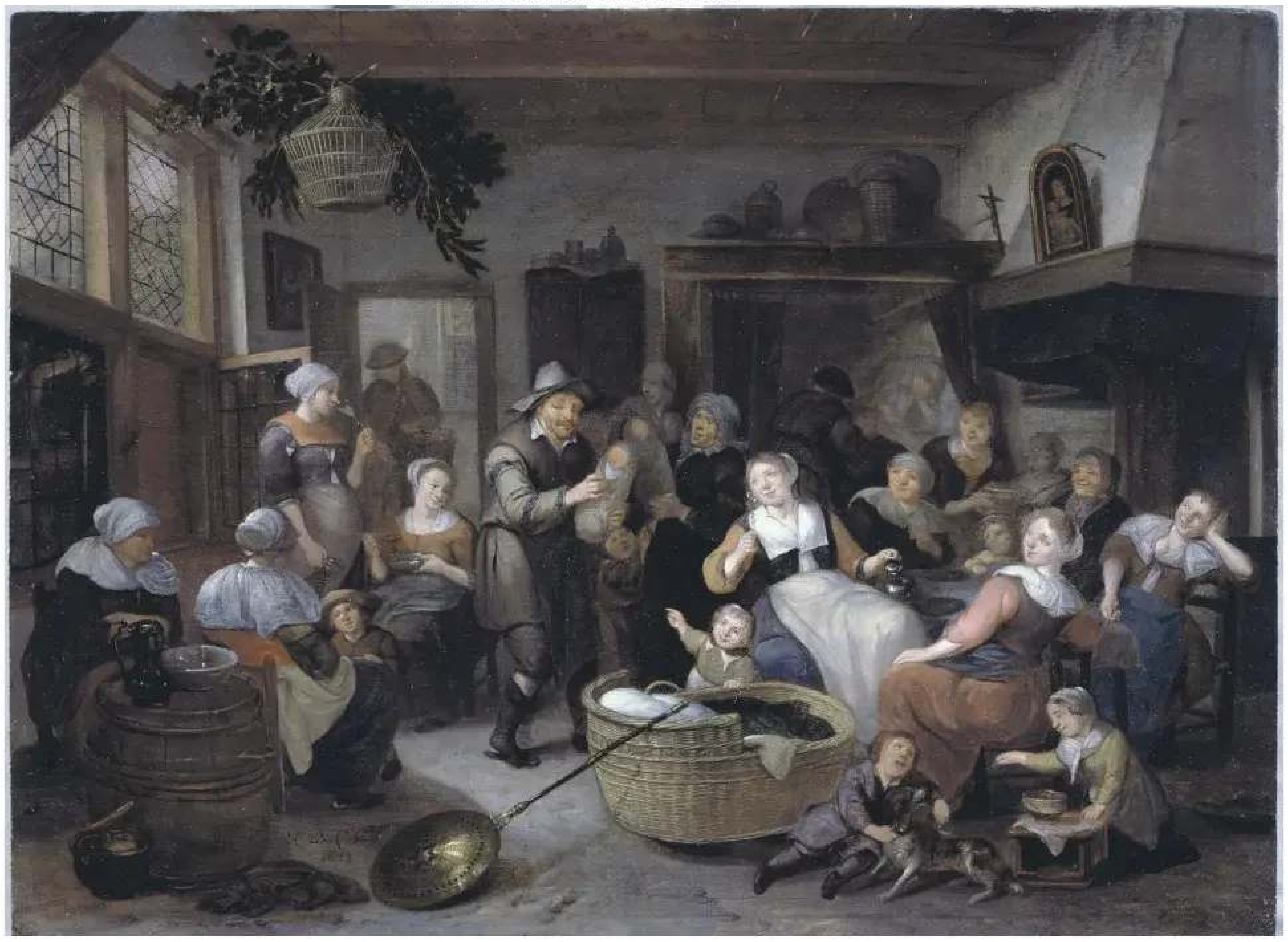
"What makes this particularly unique is that the rostrum expands while other parts of the skull shrink during winter," said Ikeda.

The team said these changes were reversible, with measurements including brain case height found to be larger in shrews that survived winter and were collected between August and November in their second year. By contrast snout width – although not snout height – was smaller.

The researchers suggest a number of explanations for the seasonal change in snout size – including regulating body temperature, increasing shrews' ability to sniff out prey, or mechanical reinforcement of the snout, allowing them to process tougher prey when food is scarce.

▲ *The common shrew shrinks skull size in winter. In long-clawed shrews the opposite occurs for the snout*

David Shrigley's London exhibition to draw out funny side of old masters



▼ *Paintings from Dutch and Flemish old masters currently on display at the Dulwich Picture Gallery*

PHOTOGRAPH: DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY

Caroline Davies

The contemporary UK artist David Shrigley will apply his trademark arch humour and distinctive artistic practice "in dialogue" with old masters of Dutch and Flemish painting in a major new solo exhibition in London.

The celebrated visual artist will explore the 17th-century paintings with his new works "responding to" and hung alongside original masterpieces by artists including Jan Steen, Adriaen Brouwer, David Teniers the Younger, Adriaen van Ostade, Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Rembrandt van Rijn.

The exhibition, opening at the Dulwich Picture Gallery next year, will be his first solo exhibition in a public art museum in the UK since his 2012 retrospective at the Hayward Gallery, and will bring his work into conversation with one of the most significant collections of Dutch and Flemish historical paintings in Britain, the gallery said.

It will present a series of brand-new, never-before-seen commissions alongside works created almost 400 years apart, and "explore the comedic side of historic painting, presenting how artists through the ages have used humour to observe everyday life, human behaviour and social interaction", the gallery said. Works from the gallery's collection will be shown with loans from large UK institutions.

Helen Hillyard, head of collection and exhibitions at the gallery, said: "We are excited for David Shrigley to bring his unique perspective to Dutch and Flemish masterpieces of the 17th century.

"Shrigley – like our historic painters – has an instinct for finding the funny side of everyday life. He is the perfect artist to bring back playfulness to the old masters, and remind us that great art doesn't always need to be serious."

The Turner prize nominee, painter, illustrator, writer, film-maker and sculptor, is renowned for his distinct line drawings and his playful and humorous subject matter.

His most recent installations have included the 2021 Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange, where the gallery was filled with new tennis balls, and the 2025 installation at the Stephen Friedman Gallery entitled Exhibition of Old Rope, consisting of 10 tonnes of used rope with a £1m price tag.

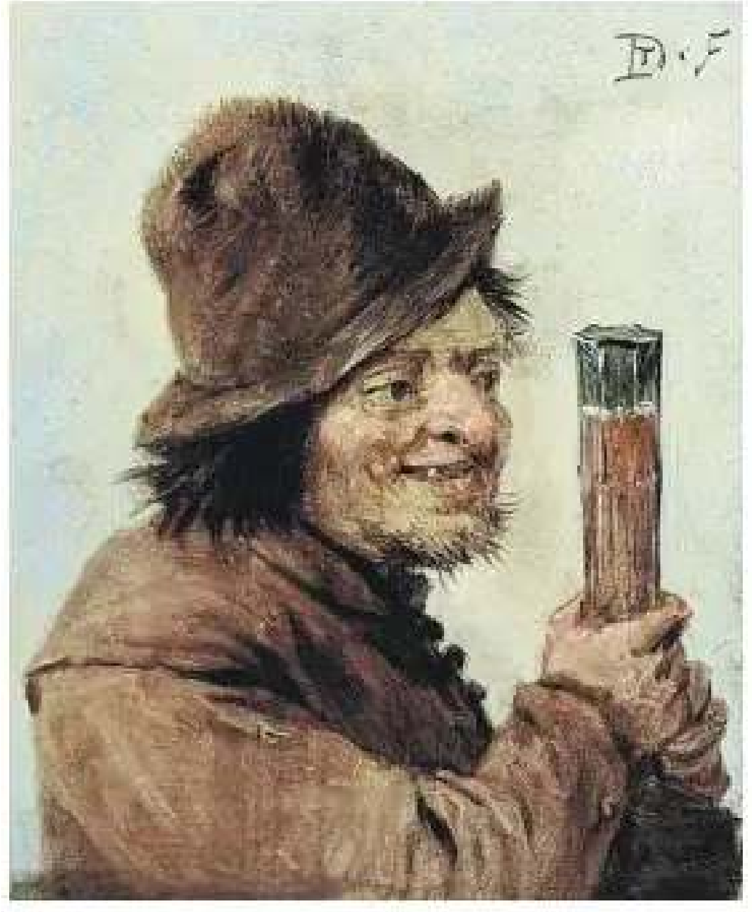
The Shrigley exhibition, which will run from 25 May to 5 September, is one of the headline exhibitions at the Dulwich Picture Gallery whose 2027-28 programme also includes what is understood to be the first UK museum exhibition devoted to the pioneering French artist Jacqueline Marval (1866-1932).

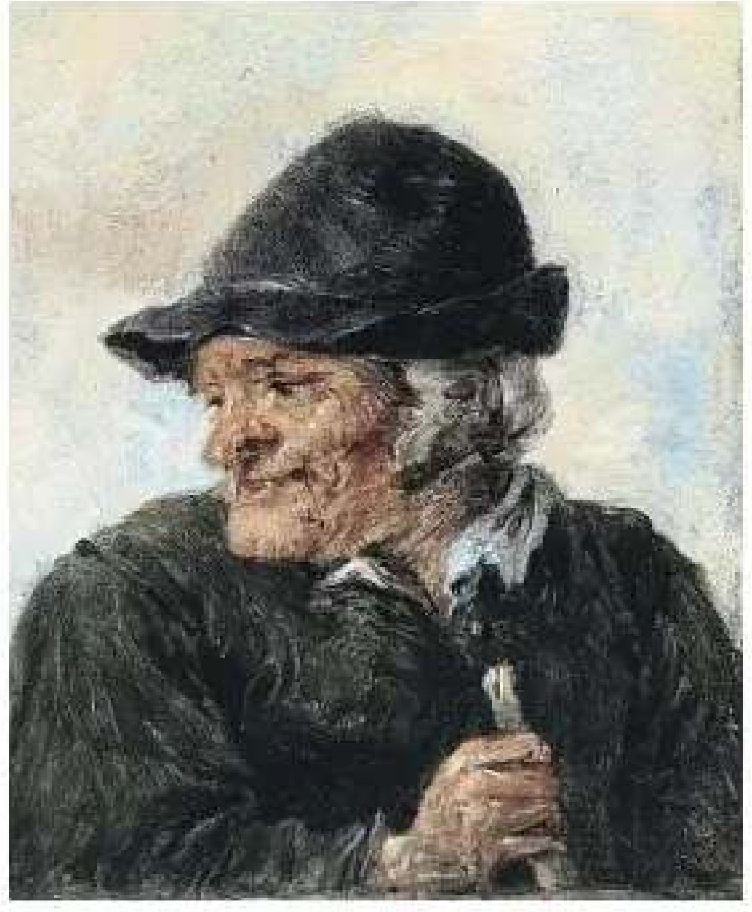
Marval is believed to have created one of the earliest female nude self-portraits in the history of painting. The exhibition, from 2 February to 9 May, will bring together more than 40 paintings and selected lithographs to highlight her vital contribution to early French modernism and her innovative representations of women and the female form, which helped to define the Parisian avant-garde.

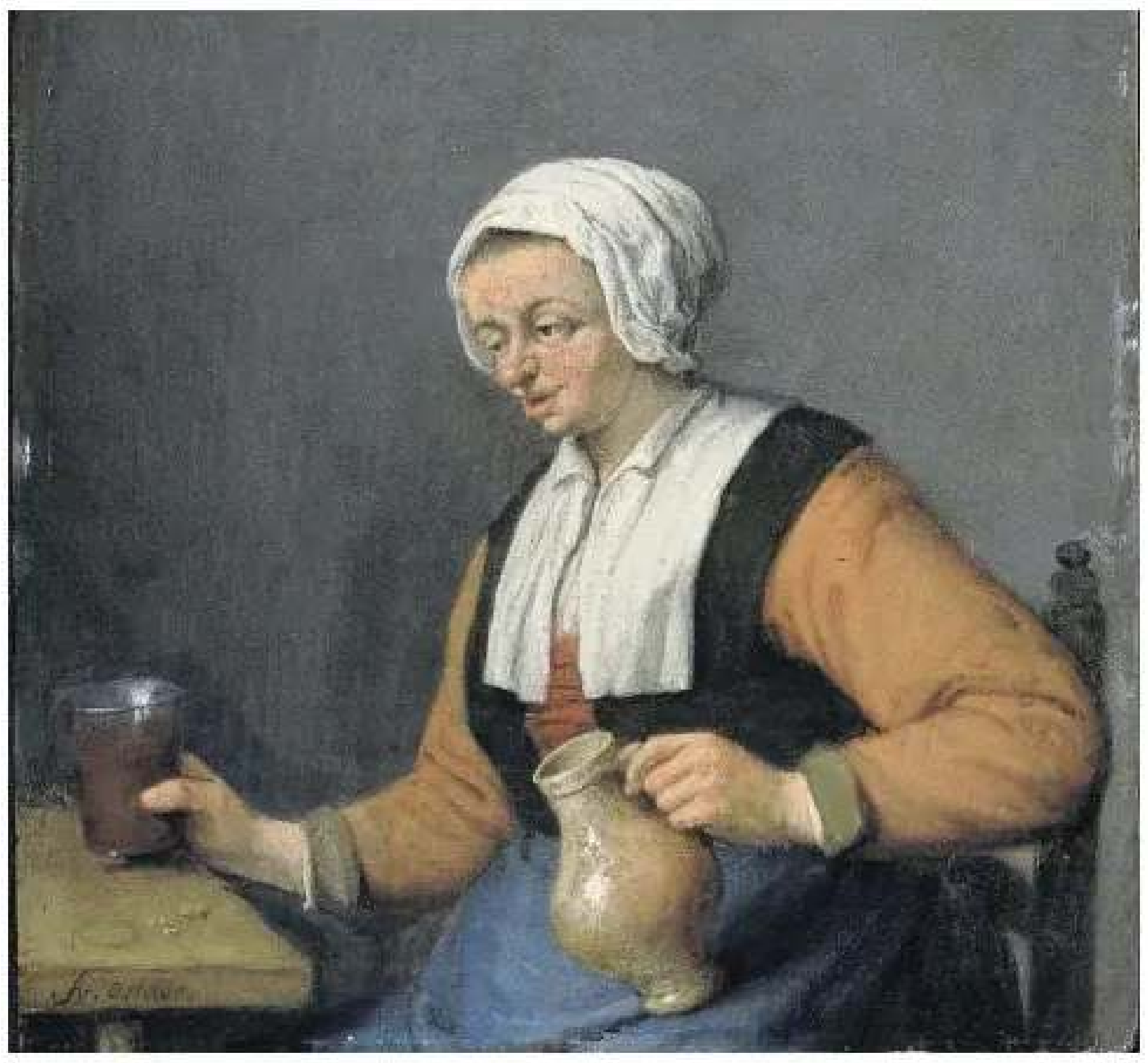
A major retrospective will celebrate the pioneering British Pakistani post-war modernist Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928-1985) in the first UK major museum exhibition in more than 30 years. A Circle, A Square, A Puzzle (21 September to 16 January) will show more than 80 works by the artist famous for Blue Blue Jazz (1967), Square Composition (1963) and the Roots series (1977-1984).

It will offer "a fresh appraisal of a pioneering artist whose work transcended cultural boundaries and transformed diverse artistic traditions across art forms and geographies", the gallery said.

Other exhibitions in the programme include solo displays featuring new commissions by Sahara Longe and Caroline Walker.







▶ *David Shrigley will be 'in dialogue' with the artists in his first UK solo show since a retrospective at the Hayward Gallery in 2012*

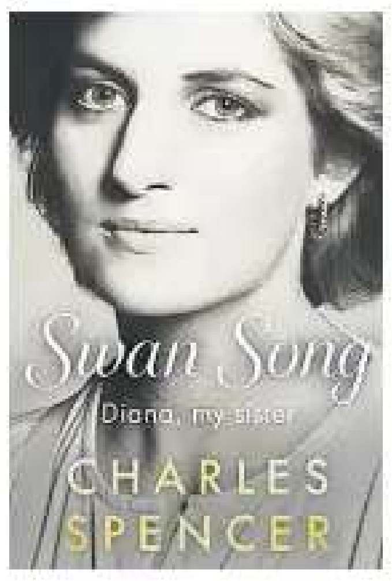
PHOTOGRAPH: KOEN VAN WEEL/EPA

'The truth about Diana': earl to publish book about his sister

Ella Creamer

Charles Spencer is to publish a book about his sister Diana in September.

In the book – titled Swan Song: Diana, My Sister – Spencer will recount the story of Diana's life and the week of her death.



◀ *The new book will tell Diana's life story and recount the week of her death, after a car accident on 31 August 1997*

It marks "the first time that Earl Spencer has spoken openly and at length about his sister", according to the book's publisher.

It will be released on 22 September in the United Kingdom.

"With the 30th anniversary of Diana's tragic death on the skyline, I've been inundated yet again with requests for interviews about my sister," said Spencer.

"This has convinced me to write down my own thoughts and memories, once and for all, rather than reading the opinions of others that have become accepted over time."

"The aim of this book is to tell the truth about Diana from her brother's perspective, just as I attempted to do when speaking at her funeral. As with my eulogy, I want to speak on Diana's behalf and do so in an openly positive way."

Spencer delivered his sister's eulogy at Westminster Abbey in September 1997, after her death on 31 August.

Daniel Bunyard, publishing director at Penguin Michael Joseph, said the book contained "many revelations that will draw considerable attention", but was also "a fitting tribute to the beloved woman who was Princess Diana".

Spencer said: "I hope this book will be of interest to the many who still cherish the memory of Diana when she was alive.

"I would be delighted if those too young to remember her in her heyday feel, after reading this, that they 'get' who she really was: a one-off, dynamic character.

"Full of love, charisma and self-doubt, who gave life a hell of a go, and left the world a far better place, despite exiting the stage while still so young."

Charities warn ministers against benefit cuts for disabled young people

Rowena Mason
Patrick Butler

More than 40 of the UK's leading charities have warned ministers against imposing tougher benefit sanctions or cuts on disabled young people as the government considers how to encourage more young people into work.

The charities raised concerns that an imminent review of young people and work by Alan Milburn could bring in stricter eligibility rules for keeping disability benefits – or remove them altogether – as part of a wider plan to boost flagging youth job rates.

Nearly 1 million 16- to 24-year-olds in the UK are classified as Neet – not in employment, education or training. Milburn has warned this is economically unsustainable and disastrous for a generation of young people.

In their joint letter to Milburn and the work and pensions secretary, Pat McFadden, charity leaders warn cutting support or bringing in sanctions risks pushing thousands of vulnerable youngsters deeper into poverty and further away from employment.

The charities fear a previous Labour government proposal for the health element of universal credit to be removed for under-22s with a disability or long-term sickness, saving about £300m a year, could be resurrected.

Milburn, a former minister in Tony Blair's government, has made it clear England's welfare, education and skills infrastructure needs to be overhauled, but has so far refused to be drawn on whether he will recommend specific cuts to benefits.

However, his interim report, published in May, argued that state support was too focused on benefit support at the expense of practical programmes to help young people into work, inadvertently "trapping" youngsters on benefits.

The report estimated that for every £1 spent on youth job support last year, £25 went on benefits for young people. This "clearly stacked" financial incentives "in favour of inactivity, not participation [in the job market]", with some young people able to achieve total benefit income of more than £2,000 a month.

It said failure to reform the benefits system, alongside education and skills, would result in "far too many young people spending far too long out of work or learning, poorer [job] prospects over time and a rising benefits bill".

An analysis by the Scope charity suggests about half of households with an under-22 receiving the universal credit health element are already in poverty, which it said could rise to more than nine in 10 if support was removed.

About 184,000 young people aged 16-24 receive the universal credit health element. Charities say this is a cohort with multiple complex physical and mental health needs.

The letter, whose signatories include Action for Children, Save the Children, Barnardos, Scope, Sense, Mind and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, says: "Change is needed. But this must be built around the principles of support and opportunity, rather than the failed punitive approaches of the past."

It adds: "Evidence shows that cutting benefits worsens health and deepens poverty, while strict conditionality and sanctions is particularly counterproductive and harmful for disabled people."

The charities challenge claims that social security budgets are out of control, pointing out that spending on working-age benefits will remain flat as a percentage of GDP over the remainder of the parliament.

Lucy Schonegevel, the director of influencing at Action for Children, said: "Cutting benefits or ramping up sanctions will simply drive up poverty and push young people further away from work. If ministers want better outcomes for disabled young people, the evidence points to earlier intervention, tailored support and meaningful job and volunteering opportunities, not sanctions or cuts."

Milburn said earlier this week that specialist internships designed to secure work for young people with special educational needs should be put on "turbocharge". He is also likely to call for primary schools to identify children at risk of becoming Neet aged 16.

Whitehall sources said no decision had been made on the proposal put forward in a 2025 green paper on removing the universal health element for those under 22. They said the issue was being looked at as part of the review.

A DWP spokesperson said: "We want to see the potential of young people up and down this country fully realised, whether that be through education, training or work.

"We are pushing ahead with the biggest youth employment reforms in a generation to create almost a million opportunities for young people and our wider £2.5bn youth employment support package includes a new apprenticeship bursary for families on universal credit.

"We have also commissioned Alan Milburn to investigate the barriers stopping young people from getting into work and look forward to receiving his final report in the autumn."

Yesterday Andy Burnham unveiled a new policy of 24-hour free bus passes for disabled people, which will enable more people to have free travel to work.

▲ *Andy Burnham received £1,500-worth of Glastonbury tickets in 2025*

PM declares donations

Donors to Andy Burnham gave almost £350,000 over the months before he became Labour leader and prime minister, with contributors including his former adviser Sacha Lord and the billionaires David Sainsbury and Gary Lubner.

The new MPs' register of interests also shows Burnham declaring hospitality and trips worth more than £12,000 – many relating to Greater Manchester in his former role as mayor, but also including £1,500 of Glastonbury tickets in 2025, where he was speaking, and £500 of tickets to Ladies Day at Aintree this year.

The register also shows he recently set up a company called Office of Andy Burnham, as leaders often do to manage their financial affairs after leaving office, and that he owns a property in London with his wife, which is rented out.

Burnham's donations include £20,000 from trade unions including Unison, the CWU and Fire Brigades Union. The biggest supporter was Sainsbury, a long-term Labour donor who gave more than £160,000, including paying for staff working on policy.

He was also given the services of a staff member on secondment by EY, and £35,000 from Lord including staffing and contractor costs, travel, venue hire, digital platforms, social media support, message testing, polling and campaign set-up.

Lord was Burnham's unpaid night-time economy adviser in Manchester but resigned from the role in January 2025 after the Arts Council said his company had misled them in applying for a £400,000 Covid support grant; Lord denies any wrongdoing.

Shortly after entering No 10, Keir Starmer faced criticism for the volume of free tickets to events he had received, including more than £100,000 in hospitality. He later changed rules brought in by the Conservatives to ensure that all hospitality taken by ministers is declared. Rowena Mason

Burnham launches 'national drive' to get rough sleepers off the streets by Christmas

Continued *from page 1*

Officials say that money will pay for 1,200 new homes and help support 3,000 people over five years.

Today he will tell local leaders they must offer a route off the streets to anyone who wants one by Christmas, announcing an additional £102m for additional services such as medical care and addiction support to help them do so.

Of that, £8.4m will go to charities and other community organisations as part of the Ending Homelessness in Communities Fund.

Burnham said he would not instruct local authorities and mayors how to use the money, saying they would know best which services were most needed in their areas.

Officials said the prime minister was not considering changing the law to force local authorities to provide accommodation for any rough sleeper who asked for it. At the moment they are only required to do so for people deemed a "priority need", such as families with children.

Burnham's aides acknowledge that some people are likely to still be on the streets at Christmas, given authorities cannot force people into accommodation if they do not want it. But the prime minister is not setting a target for how much rough sleeping will have fallen by Christmas, with officials saying only that "real progress" should have been made.

> ***'Covid proved that when we decide rough sleeping is unacceptable we can get people off streets'***
>
> **John Bird**
> *Big Issue co-founder*

▲ *Andy Burnham has pledged another £100m to efforts to end rough sleeping, in addition to £340m already announced, for 'a national drive to get everyone in for Christmas'*

PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY NICHOLLS/AFP/GETTY

Burnham is not the first prime minister to make such a pledge. Boris Johnson also promised to end rough sleeping, while Keir Starmer said he would cut it in half during his time in office.

The numbers fell sharply during the Covid pandemic as the government mobilised student accommodation, B&Bs and holiday rentals to provide a bed to anyone who wanted one under the "Everyone In" scheme.

They have risen again since the funding for that scheme was withdrawn, however, with a record 4,793 people found to be sleeping rough in England as of the government's last snapshot in autumn 2025.

Burnham himself promised to end rough sleeping as mayor of Greater Manchester. He had some success with his plans, largely by forcing greater collaboration between different organisations.

For example, he made the 10 councils under his jurisdiction share data so that someone who was rough sleeping in one area could be tracked if they travelled to another during the day. He also made sure landlords did not evict tenants because of relatively minor misdemeanours, which experts say is a major cause of street homelessness.

After several years of falling numbers however, the level of street homelessness in the city region has risen again in each of the last four years.

Homelessness campaigners welcomed the prime minister's announcement last night, though they warned that more long-term solutions would have to be put in place to deal with the country's far bigger temporary accommodation problem.

Sarah Elliott, the chief executive of the charity Shelter, said: "The prime minister's pledge to get everyone sleeping rough off the streets by Christmas is a gamechanging move and exactly the kind of bold leadership needed to end the housing emergency."

But she added: "Tackling the most visible form of homelessness is a strong start, but the almost 178,000 children hidden away in grim temporary accommodation also need somewhere to call home. The prime minister must apply the same unwavering ambition to delivering the council housing revolution he promised."

John Bird, the crossbench peer and co-founder of the Big Issue, said: "Covid proved that when we decide rough sleeping is unacceptable, we can act and get people in off the streets. This Christmas commitment is a welcome return to that spirit."

Whitehall

£500,000 for top civil servant after his sacking

Rowena Mason
Whitehall editor

The former head of the civil service Chris Wormald received a record payout, in the region of £500,000, when he was forced out of the top job in Whitehall by Keir Starmer, it has emerged.

The unprecedented payment was made after Wormald served just 14 months in the role of cabinet secretary before being replaced by Antonia Romeo.

There had been speculation about the scale of the payout, first reported by the FT, after Cat Little, the permanent secretary of the Cabinet Office, had to request a ministerial direction from Starmer in February to override value-for-money concerns before she could approve it.

In her letter to the prime minister at the time, she wrote: "In respect of value for money, I have consulted civil service HR and legal advisers and have had due regard to managing public money and the consideration of Sir Chris Wormald's employment rights in the circumstances. The proposed award is greater than what Sir Chris Wormald would be contractually entitled to.

"However, I am informed that a settlement of this level is necessary given that this is a departure from a high profile, unique role that has been agreed at very short notice."

The previous highest settlement was given to Tom Scholar, who was forced out as permanent secretary of the Treasury by Liz Truss as one of her first acts during her brief tenure as prime minister. He was given £457,000, including severance pay and compensation in lieu of notice and leave.

The Cabinet Office said: "We don't comment on individual HR matters."

Whitehall sources said £500,000 was not the exact amount given to Wormald but that more details about the level of the settlement would be published in the department's annual report and accounts.

▲ *Chris Wormald became head of the civil service in December 2024*

Sketch

John Crace

Silly season is tricky for Dicky and Honest Bob as Reform's summer offensive fizzles out

These are the doggiest of dog days. Times when hours turn into days and almost nothing happens in between. Days of precious R&R, when only a few politicians venture out, and then only to fend off accusations they are doing next to nothing and to prove they are still alive. The silliest days of the silly season. Days that are made for men like Richard Tice.

It's not clear if there has ever been much point to Dicky. Other than to encourage other halfwits that they can make half a name for themselves in public life providing they are blessed with plenty of cash and a total absence of self-awareness. Dicky likes to moan about diversity, equity and inclusion policies while remaining totally oblivious to the fact that, were life to be a genuine meritocracy, he wouldn't even make it to the starting line.

The last few months haven't been kind either to Reform or Dicky, however. One misstep after another. The party has been sliding in the polls and Nige has chosen to keep a much lower profile. All of which has made life tricky for Dicky.

Reform has needed someone to step up and fill the vacuum left by Nige, and the only one who has been consistently available has been Tice.

Nige had high hopes for Robert Jenrick, but Reform's ratings plummet every time Honest Bob makes an appearance. Which may be why Dicky was sent out with Honest Bob on Monday to try to dilute the animosity. Only it didn't quite work out, as Dicky rather stole Jenrick's thunder.

Because what people took away from Reform's press conference wasn't that Dicky would quite like benefits claimants to clean the high streets. It was that Dicky was thoroughly enjoying the extreme hot weather.

While the rest of the country was worried about drought and wildfires, and farmers were predicting Armageddon, Dicky was having the time of his life. Forget the pint of beer that he has to drink when photographed with the riff-raff – Dicky was thrilled he would soon be able to neck vintage English fizzy wines that were better than champagne.

When all things were considered, climate change was really just a state of mind. You could get all doom and gloom about it. Or you could pretend it wasn't really an issue, that attempts to combat it were a complete waste of time and try to make the most of it. We should all go out and have a barbecue. What was one more fire among so many?

Now try to imagine just how half-witted you have to be to actually say that. It's bad enough thinking it. After all, we know that Kemi Badenoch appears to have much the same attitude as she plans to throw any Tories who believe in net zero targets out of the party. But even she knows better than to say any of this while there is a national emergency in place, however much it goes against her better judgment.

Dicky has no such qualms. Just says it as he sees it. Why worry about the state of the planet in 25 years' time? As far as he is concerned, all we have is today. Make hay while the sun shines. Only we can't, because the fields are burned.

So we are left with a conundrum. Were silly seasons always quite this silly? Does Dicky actually believe a word of what he says? Or has he infantilised himself so much by talking nonsense that he no longer knows what's true? Or maybe he's a secret agent, playing the long game to bring down Reform. The more you see of Dicky, the less there is.

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Supply shock could see UK run out of gas in the 2030s, ministers warned

Jillian Ambrose
Energy correspondent

Great Britain risks running out of gas in the 2030s despite its growing clean energy sources, unless ministers take "unprecedented" action to guard against a future supply shock, according to an official assessment.

The government is considering plans to provide direct financial support to safeguard the country's ageing gas infrastructure after a consultation found that a "high stress scenario" could mean homes and businesses run out within the next decade.

Measures to support Britain's gas sector are now being considered after most respondents said the industry was not likely to prepare for "low probability, high-impact events", in which supplies could run dry as North Sea reserves continue to deplete.

Three-quarters of respondents agreed with a warning issued last year by the National Energy System Operator that an "emerging risk to gas supply security" could mean that by 2030 homes and businesses would be left without gas during a prolonged period of cold weather.

Michael Shanks, the energy minister, said: "Any form of government intervention or investment in the gas market would be unprecedented and cannot be a decision we take lightly."

These could include offering financial support to the owners of gas storage facilities and pipeline operators to make it economically viable to upgrade and maintain them in the decades ahead.

Shanks said the UK would continue to cut the UK's reliance on fossil fuels by growing its clean energy source. "However, we recognise that this transition will not happen overnight; the gas system will still play an important role in our energy system for decades to come.

"We have a responsibility to the millions of households that will be heated by gas for years ahead, the industries that rely on it for essential production, and the power system in which gas continues to play a key role," he added.

The government set out its renewed focus on securing the country's gas supplies as it prepares to deliver a verdict on the future of two North Sea oil and gasfield proposals, at the Rosebank and Jackdaw fields.

The prime minister has said he would take a "pragmatic" approach to oil and gas drilling in the North Sea. He told journalists last month: "There is a resource there. When people are struggling, we can't ignore that."

The UK relied on gas for more than a third of its energy consumption last year, according to government figures. While the UK's gas use is expected to plummet by just over three-quarters by 2050 under the guidance of the Climate Change Committee, its domestic supplies are likely to fall faster.

5%

Expected annual decline in North Sea oil and gas production, from which the UK gets half of its gas

The government expects North Sea's oil and gas production, which has been in decline for 25 years, to fall by about 5% each year, raising concerns over future gas security.

The energy system operator's first official gas supply assessment warned that even as the country turns from gas towards clean energy, there could still be potential supply shortfalls on colder than usual days - particularly if they occur when Europe's storage levels are low, or in the event of an unexpected outage at a gas import terminal or pipeline.

The UK's North Sea fields provided almost half of the gas used in UK homes and businesses over the past five years, while Norway provided just over a third. Gas imports from the US and the Middle East via tankers made up a fifth of the UK's gas.

In a statement, Shanks said: "Gas will continue to play a key role in our energy system as we transition to clean, homegrown energy. We are delivering a gas system that is fit for the future, maintaining secure supplies, ensuring value for money for consumers, and giving the sector the certainty it needs to invest in Britain's energy."

Nils Pratley *Page 32* →

Music review

Deliciously complex songs cut deep in intimate setting

Phoebe Bridgers
Union Chapel, London
★★★★★

Aimee Cliff

▸ *Phoebe Bridgers said she 'scraped from the bottom of [her] guts' for her latest album, Lost Weekend, which took centre stage at the show*
PHOTOGRAPH: TODD OWYOUNG/GETTY

In this spectral, spare form, the songs are even more astounding. The words cut even deeper when whispered

Three days after the rapturous release of her third album, Lost Weekend, Phoebe Bridgers invited 900 people into her bedroom to hear her play some of its devastating songs live - or at least, that's how it felt inside Union Chapel in north London on Monday night. With Bridgers on a throw-covered sofa, surrounded by lava lamps and a TV, it becomes easy to forget the Victorian gothic architecture looming overhead.

This intimate scene is the indie superstar's hugely anticipated first solo UK show since 2022, and the reverence in the church is palpable. Fans have obediently locked away their phones in magnetic pouches - as they will also have to on her arena run later this year - and fidget in the pews clutching CDs and T-shirts emblazoned with the artwork for her new record.

You can hear a proverbial pin drop when Bridgers opens the show by belting her breakout song Motion Sickness solo with her guitar, her voice somersaulting round the domed ceiling. (After this, she is joined on stage by two bandmates, Nick White and Christian Lee Hutson.)

But Bridgers, who hums with a slightly nervous energy, characteristically pierces through any solemnity by encouraging us to scream and sing along as the gig rolls on. After all, she quips: "God's watching - fuckin' freak."

The jokes and the screams feel like necessary pressure valves, as Lost Weekend takes centre stage at this show. Focused primarily on the tangled knot of grief she feels for her father, who died in 2023, the album is a vividly cathartic work that, as Bridgers puts it: "I really did scrape from the bottom of my guts."

It is also the artist's most musically adventurous outing yet, cloaked in a bewitching fog of crackling ambience reminiscent of Grouper, and surreal, robotic vocoder. But for this show, she dismantles the songs to their parts, with just two guitars, keys, harmonica and the occasional addition of percussion and ghostly FX.

In this spectral, spare form, the songs are even more astounding. You can really hear the bristling, soft rage as Bridgers sings "Sometimes I want you back / But not today" on Still Standing, an unflinching portrait of her "complicated" relationship with her dad. (This song and others reference his physical abuse of Bridgers' mother.)

Likewise, the seething lyrics of The Governor's Waltz, which appears to reflect on the breakdown of her engagement to Paul Mescal, seem to send a shiver through the congregation. Her words cut even deeper when near-whispered.

It's not all quiet worship. At points, stomping percussion rises to the rafters, Bridgers uses effects to contort and throw her voice, and Hutson plays some of the most ominous harmonica ever heard on their rendition of Kill Me. Then there is the album's title track, which cracks open from a soft ballad into a triumphant clatter and swell of strings, electronic chatter and disembodied voices.

The song's climax is highlighted with UV light, giving Bridgers' blond bob and the images of planets behind her a creepy glow. She is often described as a purveyor of sad songs, but her latest release contains vast emotional worlds. On Lost Weekend, she sketches grief as the sharpest edge of life: when memories of the past feel intense and the present can feel like a distant fog. It makes sense that on the first live outing here for these deliciously complex songs, there is humour and surrealism even in the devastating dark.

News
Climate crisis

Rain brings flood risk – but little relief yet from Britain's drought

Damien Gayle

Floods and drought could hit the UK at the same time this week, with heavy rain forecast to fall on hard, parched soil.

While some parts of the UK will have the "first meaningful rain for a long time" in the coming days, it will not reverse widespread drought conditions that have put pressure on wildlife, farmers, firefighters and water resources.

Yesterday, South East Water told customers in Kent to use water only for "essential" purposes, after taps ran dry on Monday for about 8,000 customers. And Wessex Water imposed the UK's latest hosepipe ban, covering 1.4m customers in Bath, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire.

The summer's fifth heatwave will be followed by wetter and cooler weather much closer to the usual conditions for the time of the year, according to the Met Office.

It said showers were expected yesterday in the north of England, particularly in the north-west, with another area of rain moving into the south-west by the evening.

This will then spread across the south of England, bringing the first spell of widespread rain to areas most in need.

"Thursday will be a day of heavy showers across much of the UK, and while some of these will be heavy, some areas will miss them altogether," the Met Office's deputy chief forecaster, Mike Silverstone, told PA Media. "As some of these showers could be intense, there is a chance of some surface water flooding as the rain falls on very dry and hard ground."

The rain may bring some welcome relief to parched land and firefighters tackling wildfires, but water shortages will persist.

Yesterday, South East Water warned customers in Kent the levels in its storage tanks remained critically low. It restored supplies to 7,400 homes in Herne Bay, Rough Common and Blean yesterday, while about 400 homes remained without water.

▲ *Collecting water in Kent, where taps ran dry in thousands of homes*

A spokesperson from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said the situation was "simply not good enough".

"South East Water needs to go further and faster to reduce leaks and follow their drought plans to ensure supplies are not disrupted in even the driest of weather," the spokesperson said.

South East Water was the first water company to issue a hosepipe ban this summer when it barred customers in some parts of Kent from using them on 3 July. Yesterday, Wessex Water became the latest, with its first ban in 50 years – since the summer of 1976.

Last Friday, Environment Agency data showed that five of England's key reservoirs are currently exceptionally low, while the National Hydrological Monitoring Programme warned that low supplies were likely to persist into the autumn.

Thames Water also urged customers to continue to limit water use. In an update yesterday, the company said that since it imposed its hosepipe ban on 23 July, household demand had fallen by 3% across London and more than 6% across the Thames Valley and home counties.

Rainfall in the Thames catchment area during July was less than 1mm, which is just 2% of the long-term average. Every day, customers used about 100 million litres more water than normal, putting pressure on rivers, reservoirs and the water network.

As a result, London reservoir storage was at 74% – far lower than expected for this time of year. "With reservoir levels below where we would expect them to be for this time of year and demand remaining high, we're asking customers to keep going and continue using only what they need," Martin Padley, water director at Thames Water said.

Liz Stephens, professor in climate risk and resilience at the University of Reading, told PA it could take many weeks of sustained rainfall for vegetation to recover and rivers and reservoirs to return to normal.

"Here in the south-east, we're still a month's worth of rain below what we would normally expect by this point in the year, despite the heavy rainfall in January and February," she said. "As a result, while any rain which falls this week may help reduce the immediate wildfire risk, it will take many weeks of sustained rainfall for vegetation to recover and our rivers and reservoirs to return to normal.

"Floods can still occur during drought conditions and surface water flooding can even become more likely as baked soils are unable to soak up rainwater as quickly."

Trees England's ancient oaks are stressed and dying in the heat

Pippa Neill
Safeerah Ahmed

England's ancient oak trees are dying in the summer's extreme heat and dry weather, according to the Woodland Trust, as trees and ecosystems are unable to adapt fast enough to the changing climate.

The heatwaves across much of Europe have had a notable impact on plant health. To cope, many trees are undergoing "early autumn", wilting and losing their leaves early.

John Parker, the chief executive of the Arboricultural Association, said: "The signs of heat stress and dry weather are visible."

Ed Pyne, a senior conservation adviser at the Woodland Trust, said it was helpful to think of a tree as being like a large pipe constantly transporting water, minerals and nutrients from the soil through its roots, up its trunk and out to its branches and leaves.

"When the trees are losing too much water it stops this process and that's when we start seeing the leaves wilting and dying, which can give rise to this early autumn phenomenon where the trees are losing their leaves early," he said.

While the impact of the extreme weather is widespread across different species, Pyne said England's ancient and veteran trees were being disproportionately affected. "These really old trees, they're survivors, but, like us, when they get old they get a bit less resilient."

This was made particularly visible by the death in June of the Major oak in Sherwood Forest, one of Europe's oldest, largest and most celebrated ancient trees. "One of the main reasons that tree died was because of these extreme weather conditions," Pyne said.

Oaks are classed as chronologically ancient from 400 years old, though many will have ancient characteristics from about 300 years. There are about 3,300 oak trees with a circumference of 6 metres or greater in England, and about 114 over 9 metres. The rest of Europe combined, including Scotland and Wales, has about 98 recorded oaks over 9 metres.

Sherwood Forest lost eight ancient oak trees in 2024 and 2025, and Pyne has identified seven in England and

◀ *The Tea Party oak in the Ickworth estate, Suffolk. Trees, like people, become less resilient during periods of extreme heat as they get older*

PHOTOGRAPH: JIM WOOLF/ WOODLAND TRUST

◀ A dead oak tree in Minstead, New Forest. Below, the Charter oak in the London borough of Bexley, surrounded by parched grass. Bottom, Sherwood Forest's 1,000-year-old Major oak was found to have died this year PHOTOGRAPHS: CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES; FABIO DE PAOLA/THE GUARDIAN

Wales that are now in a critical condition: Crow Leasow oak, Shropshire; Tea Party oak, Suffolk; King John oak, Devon; Enmore oak, Somerset; Lydham Manor oak, Shropshire; Old Knobbley, Essex; and Pwllpriddog oak, Carmarthenshire.

Pyne said: "When you get these incessant droughts year after year it's a cumulative effect which compounds across time and gets worse. Almost all of our ancient trees are struggling under these conditions. They're dying of this drought stress."

Pyne's analysis of mortality rates of ancient oaks found that half could be lost in the next 60 years. This analysis did not consider the changing climate, so Pyne believes the figure is likely to be a significant underestimate.

Parker said beech trees were also struggling with the heat. "They are possibly going into decline and may die, which would be disastrous for us," he said.

Alexander Held, a senior expert at the European Forest Institute, said in Europe even drought-tolerant trees such as pines were dying. "Our trees can't cope," he said. The impact is varied, with some trees affected by the heat and others sunburnt from the sunlight.

Angelo Morgan, a director of urban tree management at the company Trees UK of Bromley, said historically their busy period had been the winter when high winds and rain could cause a whole root system to come up. But now they were receiving an increasing number of calls to deal with "limb failure" in periods of hot and dry weather.

"The tree's vascular system isn't taking up as much moisture as it would normally do and so a lot of the limbs become very brittle and a lot of larger limbs are failing," he said.

Forests are in a state of permanent adaptation, but Held said the problem was the speed of change. "Our trees and ecosystems aren't fast enough to cope with the speed of change," he said. "These changes will likely be a big disruption to our ecosystems."

Marine life

Warming seas around Europe 'are reshaping ecosystems'

Ajit Niranjan

▲ *Climate breakdown has already warmed the Mediterranean Sea by about 2C, according to World Weather Attribution* PHOTOGRAPH: ELOI OMELLA/GETTY IMAGES

Carbon pollution has fuelled a "massive expansion" of marine heatwaves in Europe this summer, research has found, with some waters recording temperatures 6C higher than normal.

The hottest fortnights of this year would have been "virtually impossible" in a preindustrial climate in three of the four sea regions studied, according to analysis by World Weather Attribution. In the Celtic region, which covers much of the water around the British Isles, heat hit levels that used to strike just once a century.

Climate breakdown was responsible for about two-thirds of the observed excess heat, the researchers said, having warmed waters by about 2C in the Mediterranean, 1.4C in the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Peninsula, and 1.3C around Ireland and the English Channel.

The rapid analysis, which has not yet been submitted for peer review, comes as Europe reels from one of its hottest summers on record. Relentless heatwaves have killed tens of thousands of people and stripped plants of moisture, ruining crops and fuelling large wildfires.

While hot seas receive little attention, they can lead to the death of habitat-forming species such as corals and macroalgae, disrupting ecosystems and leading to large-scale mortality of fish and seabirds. They also raise dangerous overnight temperatures in coastal regions, as oceans cool slower than land.

Claire Bergin, a scientist at the Irish climate analysis research units of Maynooth University in Ireland and a co-author of the report, said: "While warmer waters for swimming may sound appealing to beachgoers in cooler countries like mine, the impacts on marine life beneath the surface is more serious.

"This has the potential to completely reshape ecosystems that coastal communities rely on for food and income, and drive damaging extreme weather on land, too."

The study, the group's first to focus on the effect of fossil fuel burning on marine heat, compared observed sea surface temperatures with simulations from climate models.

They found a "massive expansion" of marine heatwaves in 2026 that has so far hit 90% of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian coast region, and 80% of the western Mediterranean. In a hypothetical climate not heated by humanity, scientists said they would expect those figures to be half as big.

Removing the effect of climate breakdown cut the expected marine heatwave area from 70% to 9% in the eastern Mediterranean, and from 80% to 30% in the Celtic region, the analysis showed.

Separate research published in January found that marine heatwaves lead to more intense rainfall on land. Globally, about 5-25% of extreme rainfall over coastal land is accompanied by a nearby marine heatwave, the study found. Rainfall during extreme downpours influenced by a strong heatwave was found to be 20-30% higher.

Europe is the fastest-warming continent and is increasingly reckoning with the consequences of planet-heating pollution with which it has disproportionately polluted the atmosphere.

In recent years, it has been struck by a series of catastrophic weather events found to have been made worse by climate breakdown.

Mohamed Adow, the director of Power Shift Africa, a climate thinktank, who was not involved in the study, said: "Europe cannot acknowledge the science with one hand while continuing to expand fossil fuels with the other."

Continued *from page 1*

Ulez led to lung improvements among London children – study

found that by the age of eight or nine, children from the most polluted areas had 5-10% less lung capacity than their peers elsewhere.

That impairment, which scientists said was the result of exposure to nitrogen dioxide, put them at increased risk as adults of developing respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular and metabolic disease, and premature death.

Londoners' health was cited by the mayor, Sadiq Khan, to justify the introduction of Ulez – the world's largest and most ambitious low-emission zone – in 2019. At the time, the policy, while intuitively sensible, lacked evidence, but researchers at Queen Mary saw an opportunity.

Before Ulez came into force, they recruited 1,664 children aged six to nine in London and 1,750 in Luton, which, as a town with a similar mix of traffic pollutants but no clean air zone, was used as a control.

The team measured and monitored the children's size and health at annual school visits from 2018 to 2022 to assess how changes to air quality after the introduction of Ulez had affected their lung development.

Initial measurements showed children in London had significantly smaller lungs compared with those in Luton. But after Ulez took effect, the size and health of the London children's lungs improved until they were comparable with their Luton peers.

The children's lung function improvements correlated strongly with air quality improvements. The researchers found within five years of Ulez coming into force, the London children's exposure to nitrogen dioxide fell twice as fast and twice as much as that of the Luton children.

Writing in the Guardian, Khan said: "Introducing and expanding the Ulez involved some incredibly difficult decisions. I never took them lightly, but I knew that – as mayor – I could not stand by while Londoners young and old lost their lives to a problem it was within my power to solve.

"For years, politicians and pundits opposed to the Ulez have cynically sought to turn questions of public health into a crude culture war. Today, though, it's clear that we're winning the battle against toxic air in the capital – and it's London's children who are reaping the rewards."

The health minister Karin Smyth said the study was "a powerful reminder of the impact that air quality has on children's lung health".

"[It] will help to improve our understanding of how reductions in air pollution can restore normal lung growth among children, reduce the risk of respiratory illnesses in adulthood, and support our goal to give every child the best start in life."

▲ *Air pollution from traffic stunted children's lung growth for decades*

Camilla says she was 'longing to let out' king's cancer secret

Caroline Davies

The queen has spoken for the first time of how difficult she found it to keep King Charles's cancer a secret before it was announced publicly.

Camilla found herself "longing to let it out" during a visit to a Maggie's cancer support centre in 2024, after Charles had received his diagnosis but before the news was released.

Speaking in a short film, released on the royal family's and Maggie's YouTube channels today to mark the charity's 30th anniversary, Camilla said she "almost said something", but knew she couldn't, when she launched Maggie's new centre at the Royal Free hospital in London on 31 January 2024.

Maggie's provides free emotional and practical support to cancer patients and their loved ones at drop-in centres across the UK. Camilla has served as its president since 2008.

At the time of Camilla's visit, Charles was recovering from treatment for an enlarged prostate but had already been diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer, which was eventually announced by Buckingham Palace five days later.

"I remember coming to see a Maggie's just after the king being diagnosed. Nobody could say anything at the time. That was quite difficult," she told Maggie's chief executive, Laura Lee, who was filmed in conversation with Camilla at Clarence House.

▲ *'Nothing stopped him,' the queen said of Charles's return to public life*

"I almost said something but, you know, I felt that it wasn't the time to say. [I] looked at everybody who was suffering and all the relations and I think it made me realise even more how important these places were."

She told Lee: "I was just longing to let it out but obviously I couldn't."

Talking to visitors at the centre, Camilla said she was "almost questioning them", but did not "want to pry too deeply". She said: "But normally when I went in, I was just talking to them, but I don't know, I felt it was much more deep."

Charles returned to public-facing engagements in April 2024, less than three months after his treatment began. Speaking of his refusal to slow down, Camilla said: "Look at my husband. Nothing stopped him. He just said, 'This is my way. I'm going to cope with it.'"

She added: "It had never really come back to roost at home, and suddenly your husband is diagnosed, and you think, 'Goodness I've been talking to all these people and now I'm the one with some relation, who's got to help to look after my poor husband and try and understand it all.'"

Camilla released the seven-minute film to highlight the vital support Maggie's offers to cancer patients – especially to men, who may be more reluctant to seek help – and to promote the services they provide for patients' families.

She called on every hospital to have a Maggie's centre. The organisation has 27 centres in the UK, all built in the grounds of major NHS cancer hospitals, and supports hundreds of thousands of people affected by cancer each year, including with free psychological, emotional and practical support.

Phyllida Law, acclaimed actor across stage and screen, dies aged 94

Andrew Pulver

Phyllida Law, whose prolific acting career encompassed stage, TV and film roles – a number of which were alongside her daughters, Emma and Sophie Thompson – has died aged 94.

Law's personal manager, Jacky Leggo, said in a statement yesterday that she "died supremely peacefully at home, surrounded by all her family".

Born in Glasgow in 1932, Law was accepted at the prestigious Bristol Old Vic Theatre school – initially intending to be a stage designer but then switching to acting. She appeared in a number of Bristol Old Vic productions in the 1950s, and it was there she met Eric Thompson, a fellow actor, whom she married in 1957.

Law broke into TV in the late 50s and appeared on screen throughout the 60s in shows such as Dr Finlay's Casebook and Dixon of Dock Green.

By the end of the 1970s she had appeared in significant stage roles, including replacing Carole Boyer in the original 1967 production of A Day in the Death of Joe Egg after it transferred to the Comedy theatre in London from the Citizens in Glasgow.

She also appeared alongside Alec Guinness in the first run of John Mortimer's A Voyage Round My Father at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 1971, and Alan Bennett's Habeas Corpus at the Oxford Playhouse in 1973.

Law also joined the National Theatre, appearing in 1979 in Somerset Maugham's For Services Rendered and JB Priestley's When We Are Married.

From the late 80s she achieved more prominence in film, appearing alongside daughter Emma in Peter's Friends (directed by Emma Thompson's then husband, Kenneth Branagh), Much Ado About Nothing, and the Gwyneth Paltrow-led adaptation of Jane Austen's Emma alongside her other daughter, Sophie.

Law then appeared with Emma – playing mother and daughter – in The Winter Guest, Alan Rickman's feature film directing debut, which won considerable acclaim.

She continued to appear in high-prestige TV shows, including Waking the Dead, Rosemary & Thyme, Foyle's War, Doc Martin and Agatha Christie's Poirot, and had a recurring role in the Stephen Fry lawyer comedy drama Kingdom as Fry's Aunt Auriel. Her final screen role was in the 2020 romance Then Came You, written by and starring Kathie Lee Gifford. Law was married to Eric Thompson until his death in 1982, and is survived by their children, Emma and Sophie.

▶ *Phyllida Law on a night out with her eldest daughter, Emma Thompson, in Soho, 2013. Law acted in films with Thompson and her other daughter, Sophie*

PHOTOGRAPH: WENN RIGHTS LTD/ALAMY

Obituary *Journal, page 6* →

Swedish MP intervenes in 'damaging' row over deporting elderly Briton

Lisa O'Carroll

The removal of British citizens from Sweden over Brexit residency rights is "damaging" relations with the UK, a Swedish MP has warned.

Häkan Svenneling, representative for Värmland, where a 78-year-old British widow has been given four weeks to leave the country after 21 years of residency, has written to the migration minister, Johan Forssell, asking what he "intends to do to stop the deportations".

Svenneling, an opposition MP, is due to meet Joyce Thomas today, a week after she was told an appeal over a removal order giving her four weeks to leave the country had failed.

Thomas told the Guardian: "I am in shock. I feel sick. An individual's life is at stake at my age. It is hell. I have done nothing wrong."

The retired nurse moved to Sweden with her financier husband when she was 57, to be closer to one of their sons and grandchildren.

Her husband, who died of cancer in 2023, did all the household administrative work but Thomas and her friends have said repeatedly they checked to see if they had to complete any forms to remain in the country after Brexit and were told there was nothing to be done.

She made a late application to remain in the country in 2023, just weeks after they returned from the UK but missing the deadline of 31 December 2021.

Svenneling says in his letter to Forssell that the UK's withdrawal "was not intended to result in elderly people who had lived in Sweden for decades losing their rights to remain because of a missed deadline or deficiencies in their application [to stay]".

It adds to pressure on prime minister Ulf Kristersson's centre-right coalition to address rising concerns over the way Sweden is implementing the EU-UK withdrawal agreement, a legally binding international treaty.

"The UK has long been an important partner for Sweden in a wide range of areas. It is clear that the deportations now taking place are damaging bilateral relations between Sweden and the UK," Svenneling said.

The Migration Agency in Sweden said it was unable to discuss individual cases but that not knowing a Brexit application had to be made to remain in the country was not a "reasonable ground" to stay.

◀ *Joyce Thomas, 78, has lived in Sweden for more than 20 years but has been ordered to leave within four weeks*

Barking mad? How residents of England's 'least friendly' borough feel about ranking

Rachel Hall

'Children run to me and say "grandma" and hug me. It's amazing. I'm very happy. I belong here'

Alice Fokuo
Market trader

▼ *Residents are concerned that the once-bustling market is not attracting many younger people who prefer to shop online. Adrian Stan, below right, wants the council to do more to support rough sleepers*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDY HALL/THE GUARDIAN

Alice Fokuo is so friendly with her neighbour that they have exchanged keys to each other's homes. The level of intimacy is such that "I call her mum, because she cooks for me".

So the market trader from Barking was surprised to learn that her borough ranked the least friendly in England in a new study drawing on government data from the community life survey. It measures how often people chat to neighbours, feelings of loneliness and belonging, local pride, and levels of participation in civic life in England's 296 local authority areas.

"Everyone who passes says hello, children run to me and say 'grandma' and hug me. It's amazing. I don't know about other people, because everyone is different, but to me they're nice," she said. "I'm very happy. I belong here."

However, she worried that the once-bustling market was losing its role as a community space as younger people make more purchases online. She values its sociable atmosphere: "Here people come, sometimes six or seven people will be standing, I won't even have a seat to sit on. The customers are friendly to me, they bring me food."

Many people in Barking's town centre who spoke to the Guardian shared Fokuo's fondness for their neighbours, but expressed concerns about living in London's most indebted borough, Barking and Dagenham, and the lack of well-cared for public spaces.

Adrian Stan, a 31-year-old cleaner, was sitting relaxing after work on a bench designed to resemble a tree stump in Barking's Arboretum Place. He appreciated that there was "a friendly spot" where he could mingle with friends for free, but complained that there weren't more seating options in the square, and about its upkeep.

"There is space for improvement," he said, noting that the square would benefit from picnic tables, or activities aimed at younger people such as a skate park. He also wanted the council to do more to support rough sleepers in the borough, which has high rates of deprivation, poverty and homelessness.

But he found that people living in one of the UK's most ethnically diverse boroughs are "open to new people" and that they "really listen to what you're going through".

Rana Meybeci, 33, shared Stan's concerns. She has two young children, and worries about spending time in areas that are visibly dirty and strewn with litter. Meybeci also feels unsafe in Barking town centre, because of the level of antisocial behaviour, drug addiction and street drinking.

"Sometimes people are shouting, walking towards you," she said. "People are so unkind, and with children, I feel always 'come here baby, sit here'. I always feel I should protect them."

Although she does not feel proud of Barking town centre, Meybeci is happy living in nearby Barking Riverside, a newly developed residential neighbourhood created on an ex-industrial brownfield site. "We have a really good community here," she said.

George Mathew, 69, is also a resident of Barking Riverside. "I would say my area is very calm and quiet," he said. "All the people are quite friendly and mingle, and we update each other online. We have some close friends near my house. If you want any help, they are ready to help out. It's a good community."

The development has faced criticism for its isolated geography, as well as a dearth of amenities, from cafes and restaurants to GP services. Mathew agrees: "The social and public spaces haven't developed so much. At present, there are only a few shops. When you consider all the population there, there should be more."

Author Berry-Dee is dropped by publisher after abuse allegations

Ella Creamer

▲ *Christopher Berry-Dee has denied all the allegations made against him*

The main publisher of the bestselling true crime writer Christopher Berry-Dee has dropped the author after a Guardian investigation into allegations of violence and sexual abuse against him, which he denies.

"We are shocked and appalled by the very serious allegations relating to Christopher Berry-Dee, and our thoughts are with those affected," said the publisher Bonnier Books in a statement to the Guardian.

"Bonnier Books UK will no longer publish Christopher Berry-Dee, we will not work with him on any future projects, and we are terminating all existing agreements," it continued.

"There are practical steps entailed in unwinding longstanding contracts, including those involving third parties, but we are working through them as quickly as we can. We will also be removing our existing stocks from the market."

Waterstones has also removed his books from sale.

An investigation published on Saturday detailed multiple allegations of abuse by Berry-Dee, including domestic violence and sexual assault of a 13-year-old student attending his art school.

Berry-Dee refused to be interviewed for the piece, citing health issues, but denied the allegations. He said: "I have not once committed any of the crimes you accuse me of."

Berry-Dee, 78, is the UK's top-selling author of true crime. His books, including Talking With Serial Killers, draw on interviews with murderers and have sold nearly 1m copies. Berry-Dee has admitted lying to his subjects in order to gain access, telling them he intends "to write a book about the miscarriage of justice they are suffering", he wrote in his 2023 book Talking With Psychopaths and Savages.

Waterstones told the Guardian that Bonnier contacted the bookseller to say it would no longer publish Berry-Dee's books.

"Following this advice, we have removed the titles from sale in our shops and online," said a representative.

Orion, an imprint of Hachette, published Inside the Darkest Minds by Berry-Dee last month, but did not respond when asked whether they will continue to publish it.

Campaigner was filming TV series during fatal air accident

Raphael Boyd

A disability campaigner who was paralysed from the chest down died after her microlight crashed while filming a TV series for Apple, an inquest has heard.

Claire Lomas, 44, who was the first person to complete a marathon with the help of a "bionic" suit, died weeks after the light aircraft she was travelling in veered off the runway and hit a large rock while landing in Amman, Jordan, on 15 July 2024.

Lomas became a campaigner for disability causes after a horse riding accident in 2007 left her paralysed.

Louise Pinder, senior coroner for Rutland and North Leicestershire, told the inquest yesterday that Lomas suffered severe traumatic injuries during the crash and was taken to the King Hussein medical centre, where she remained for five weeks until her death on 22 August.

The hearing, which took place at County Hall in Glenfield, Leicestershire, was told that at the time of her accident, Lomas had been wearing an Apple Vision Pro headset and was filming content for the tech company to be used in a series promoting the product.

Lina Zilinskaite, a senior producer for Atlantic Productions, told the inquest that Apple had commissioned her company to create the series, and Lomas was one of several athletes who were selected to perform "some sort of challenge or feat" in different episodes.

Zilinskaite told the inquest Lomas had been "very enthusiastic and keen and excited about the opportunity" and that she had got a licence to fly a microlight, the aircraft she was piloting at the time of the crash, years before the series was commissioned.

Ben Ashman, a microlight designer and manufacturer, said Lomas had bought her own version of the aircraft between 2022 and 2023, which had been adapted to support her disability.

Speaking about the events leading up to the crash, Zilinskaite told the hearing that Lomas's flight had been scheduled for the previous day but was cancelled "because of strong winds". Zilinskaite added that there had been test flights using the Vision Pro in the UK without Lomas, and that the former chiropractor had flown the microlight herself before the accident, albeit without wearing the headset.

The inquest was told that on the day of the flight, Lomas had taken off from the runway in Jordan without issue and remained in the air for roughly 15 minutes before attempting to land, but that upon descending her "approach was not quite straight on" and that she "veered off the runway" before striking a large rock.

The inquest heard that Lomas – who completed the London Marathon over 17 days in 2012, becoming the first person to finish a marathon with the assistance of "bionic" legs – had been excited to return to the UK after the crash and see her family, but that her health rapidly deteriorated after catching an infection, which led to her death.

Pinder said the quality of care Lomas received in the Jordanian hospital had been highlighted by her family, but that it was not within her jurisdiction to investigate that.

The inquest continues.

▶ *Claire Lomas crosses the finish line of the London Marathon in 2012, becoming the first person to do so with 'bionic' legs*
PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA

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Toby Young’s activist group crowdfunded £60,000 for a legal case fought pro bono

Aisha Down

Staff at a campaign group that claims to defend free speech in Britain said it would “need to explain” how it spent roughly £60,000 that was crowdfunded for a legal case that was ultimately fought by a pro bono lawyer.

The Free Speech Union (FSU), an activist group founded by the Conservative life peer Toby Young, last year took up the case of Julian Foulkes, a 71-year-old retired police officer who had been arrested 18 months earlier after writing a social media post about antisemitism

The case generated widespread controversy, with rightwing publications describing it as a “thought crime” arrest. With the help of the FSU, Foulkes launched a legal action against Kent police, the force that had originally detained him.

The FSU started a crowdfunder for Foulkes, which quickly raised £50,000 and then increased its target to £100,000. “We don’t think Kent Police should be allowed to get away with such appalling behaviour,” said the campaign page, which urged donors to help him “hold the Kent Police to account”.

“The money raised by this crowdfunder will be used to cover the legal expenses Julian has run up so far, as well as the additional cost of suing Kent Police,” it said. Kent police, which had previously apologised for the incident, soon after awarded Foulkes an out-of-court settlement of £20,000.

> ***‘At some point we will need to explain what we did with all that money raised’***
>
> **Senior staff member**
> *In internal FSU email*

But sources close to the FSU, and internal communications seen by the Guardian, suggest that money raised through the crowdfunder did not go entirely to Foulkes’s case. Foulkes’s action was handled free of charge by a London-based solicitor, according to sources and the FSU’s own social media posts.

Internally, it appears staffers at the FSU were aware of the inconsistency between a crowdfunder campaign to pay for the legal action, and the appointment of the pro bono lawyer.

“Julian Foulkes … can be quietly sidelined,” says one email seen by the Guardian, which was sent by a senior FSU staff member in July 2025. “At some point we will need to explain what we did with all that money raised for a case done pro bono.”

Internally, “it was just a big joke to everyone”, said a source who had previously worked for the FSU. “Haha, we raised all that money, let’s hope no one ever finds out about it.”

In response to queries from the Guardian, Lord Young said: “Foulkes’s case was not handled on an exclusively pro bono basis,” adding that there was another lawyer involved and Foulkes himself had had separate legal costs. Young would not elaborate on what those were, and Foulkes did not answer questions as to whether he had been given money from the FSU for other expenses.

Young added: “Any funds raised over and above what was needed to pay for external legal costs in Julian Foulkes’s case would have been reallocated to pay for external legal costs in other similar cases (and not for any other purpose).”

When asked by the Guardian if the FSU had given him money to cover his expenses, and whether he was aware that his case was handled pro bono, Foulkes said his case was “done and dusted”, and declined to answer further questions.

The inconsistencies raise questions about the funding and integrity of an organisation that claims to have fought more than 6,000 cases on behalf of individuals who have been “cancelled or silenced” across the political spectrum.

Founded by Young, the FSU describes itself as “a non-partisan, mass membership public interest body” fighting for anyone who gets into trouble for exercising their freedom of speech. Critics, however, see it as a partisan rallying point for “anti-woke” grievance.

These are not the first questions to surface about how the FSU funds itself. Earlier this summer, the Guardian reported that the US state department intended to give $5m (£3.7m) to the Free Speech Union International, an offshoot of the FSU. Accepting that grant would mean putting the international organisation at odds with the principles the UK chapter of the FSU lays out on its website: “We take no government money and have no political agenda.”

In the past, the FSU appears to have raised amounts in charity fundraisers that are in excess of what the stated purpose of those fundraisers would require. Last year, the organisation attempted to raise £250,000 for the Irish comedian Graham Linehan after he was arrested at Heathrow airport for his social media posts, after an initial target of £100,000. Linehan was compensated with £25,000 by the Met police in an out-of-court settlement this July.

David Greenwood, a London-based solicitor, said cases against the police that ended in a straightforward out-of-court settlement would “definitely not” need £250,000 to cover legal fees. He estimated that these would run between £20,000 and £60,000.

“The targets are always above the money needed to cover legal costs,” said a source who worked for the FSU.

Both the page for Foulkes’s fundraiser and the page for Linehan’s fundraiser have been taken off the FSU’s website.

In response to further queries, Young said: “All the money we raise in our case-specific crowdfunders is ringfenced and anything we don’t use to pay for external legal costs connected to those cases is reallocated to pay for external legal costs connected to other similar cases. Your sources clearly have no knowledge of the FSU’s accounting practices.

“In the last year, the FSU has represented 46 separate people in criminal cases or actions against the police. The money we’ve raised from the handful of case-specific crowdfunders we’ve launched in the past year does not cover the external legal costs of fighting those 46 cases, so even after the reallocation of any leftover funds we have to find additional money from elsewhere.”

Luke Gittos, the London-based solicitor the FSU engaged for the Foulkes case, did not respond to a request for comment.

FREE SPEECH UNION
AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM
anything at all,
people

◀ *‘Anything we don’t use to pay for external legal costs … is reallocated to pay for external legal costs connected to other similar cases,’ said Toby Young, the FSU’s founder*

PHOTOGRAPH: GUY CORBISHLEY/ ALAMY

▲ *Ben Clark was in Mallorca on holiday last June with his daughter*

Holidaymaker died after he fell from a cliff during a walk, inquest hears

PA Media

A 41-year-old man who was on holiday in Mallorca died after falling from a cliff on a walk, an inquest has heard.

Ben Clark, who lived in Andover, Hampshire, died on 26 June last year while on holiday with his daughter for the first time, which he was “really excited” about.

Winchester coroner’s court heard yesterday that the pair had become friends with another British woman and her aunt who they socialised with around the pool on their trip.

The area coroner, Jason Pegg, said there was clearly “some attraction” between Clark and the woman, Nicky Foers, and they decided to go for a walk together down to the beach at about 11.30pm that evening.

The coroner said it was “slightly unclear” what caused Clark to fall from the cliff but believed alcohol probably contributed to him losing his footing. Pegg said it was unclear what happened prior to the fall, but there was a possibility that Clark and Foers went to hug each other and lost their balance.

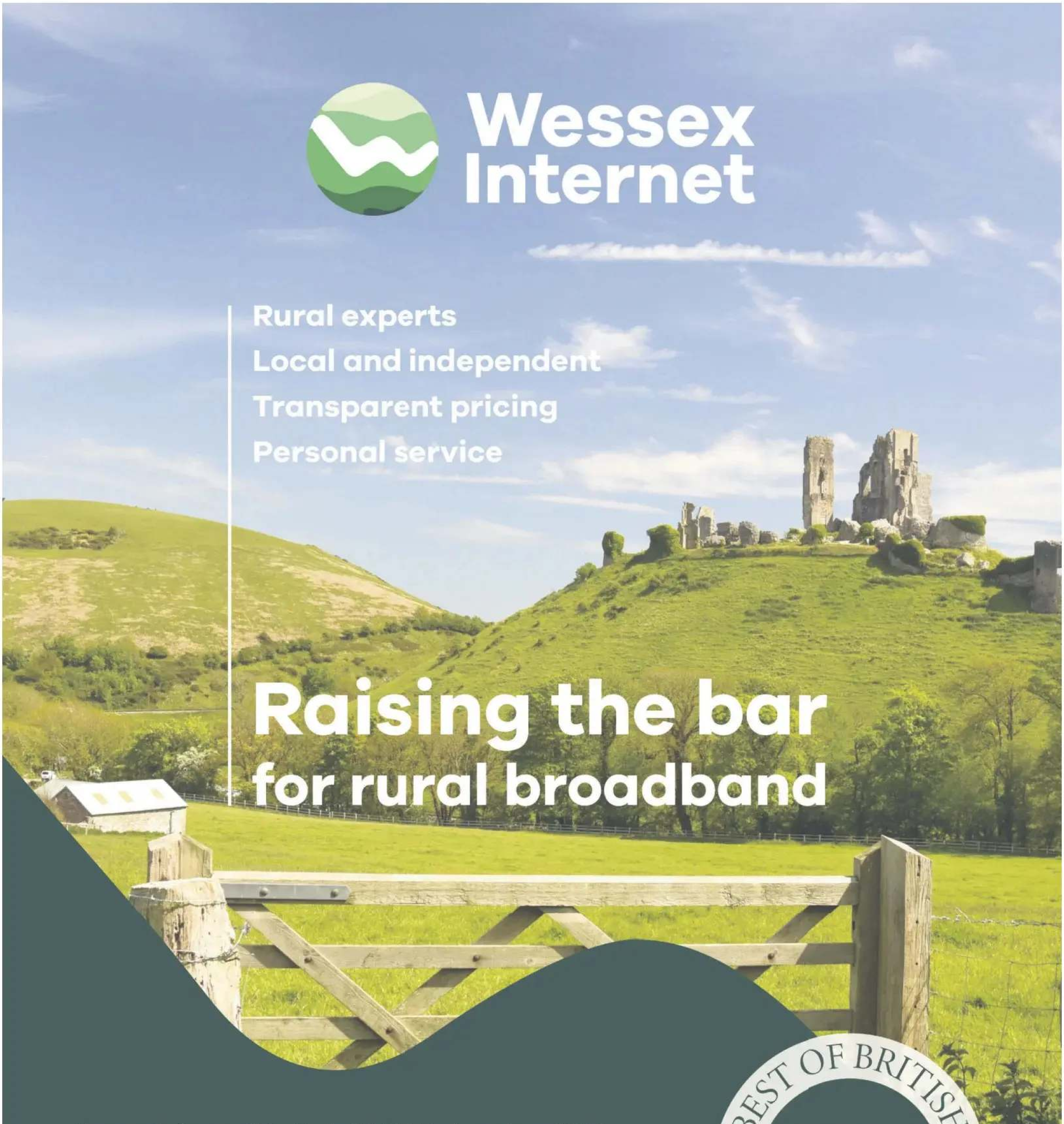
Giving evidence yesterday, Foers told the inquest her last memory before the fall was being stood face to face, adding: “I remember seeing my feet, flip-flops coming off and just rolling and rolling and rolling. I’m guessing he would have given me a hug and that’s what made me stumble back.”

She said when she came round, as she believed she was unconscious, she thought Clark had not fallen and she had just slipped. “I didn’t know if he panicked [or had] gone to find help, I didn’t even think he’d fell,” she said.

The coroner recorded Clark’s death as an accident, after he fell down the footpath on to the beach below causing multiple rib fractures, which led to pulmonary haemorrhage – bleeding in the lungs – and subsequently respiratory failure.

“Ben was intoxicated with alcohol, which contributed to death,” Pegg said.

The inquest, which was attended by his family, heard Clark was described as really funny, someone who adored his children and was a much-loved grandson, son, brother and father.

Wessex Internet

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Prevent is failing young people 'fixated with violence' – children's commissioner

Jamie Grierson

The children's commissioner for England has warned of a group of children "intoxicated by extremism" who need help the UK government's anti-terror programme cannot provide.

Referrals to Prevent involving children have risen in the past decade, from 2,918 in 2016-17 to 4,715 in 2024-25. Prevent was designed to safeguard vulnerable people from being radicalised or drawn into extremism.

Axel Rudakubana, who killed three girls at a dance class in Southport when he was 17, had been referred to Prevent three times, but his case was closed over a lack of clear ideology.

The chair of the inquiry into that attack has previously said officers were "hampered" by a lack of clarity on whether they should take someone on who demonstrated signs of being fixated on violence but without adherence to a particular ideology.

In a report published yesterday, the children's commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, called for a "stronger safeguarding response particularly for children who are fixated with violence but have no identified extremist ideology".

"It is clear that we have a cohort of children becoming intoxicated by extremism, radicalisation or a desire to harm others, who need interventions that Prevent is not able to provide," she said in the report.

Her office's analysis suggested 71% of referrals to Prevent involved children who did not have a clear ideology, with many linked to exposure to harmful content online such as videos of violence, discussion of weapons and sharing of extreme pornography.

Of the total Prevent referrals for children between April 2024 and March 2025, 79% were closed without progressing through the programme. Almost 60% of referrals came from education providers, while police accounted for 20% and local authorities 11%.

But the commissioner's office found that at least 65% of referrals from education providers were referred back to them on closing, the vast majority of which (93%) had not progressed any further through the Prevent programme.

The report said: "This highlights that there is a group of children which professionals are greatly concerned about, and seeking support for, but are finding closed doors and dead ends."

De Souza has called for the Home Office and Department for Education to issue joint statutory guidance on children who pose a risk to others.

She said this should require all children deemed to be violence-fixated, or where there are concerns around being drawn into terrorism or other criminality, to be referred to local authority safeguarding teams alongside Prevent.

The assessment teams should "act as a 'triage' for all these children, including drawing on expertise from counter-terror police at the initial assessment stage when concerns about terrorism are identified, and then children should be allocated to the appropriate intervention from there".

A government spokesperson said: "We are committed to ensuring all children are safe from radicalisation and Prevent plays a crucial role in this, moving more than 6,000 people away from violent ideologies since 2015.

"Every Prevent referral is assessed thoroughly by experts. If it's determined a person is not at risk of being drawn into terrorism, it is right they are supported by other, more appropriate services.

"We thank the children's commissioner for her report. We are reviewing it alongside our work in response to the Southport inquiry, including developing further options to manage those fascinated with extreme violence."

PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN

▲ *Xhloe and Natasha handle heavy subject matter with a light touch as they play numerous locals in a satirical Appalachian adventure*

Theatre review Clowns with a conscience take on America

Bigfoot Ripped My Dog in Half I Saw It

Summerhall, Edinburgh

★★★★☆

Chris Wiegand

Here is a show every bit as breathless as its title, stoked by bursts of high-energy 90s chart hits and delivered just as slickly by Xhloe and Natasha. It's almost as if these camo clowns with their rosy cheeks and tearstained eyes are executing a mission.

The duo have previously played confused cowboys (And Then the Rodeo Burned Down), spiralling housewives (What If They Ate the Baby?) and spit-promise scouts (A Letter to Lyndon B Johnson or God: Whoever Reads This First). Here the terrain is recognisable yet more expansive as they play numerous locals in an Appalachian town.

Mostly they're in character as a couple of teenagers who wind up in trouble until a scapegoat arrives in the unlikely form of Bigfoot. This show works on several levels, capturing a specific locale and era while remaining timeless and giving a state of the union address that is bang up to date. Misinformation, misdirection and flagrant cover-ups create a daisy chain of lies. The environment is treated like dirt. The stop sign that looms in the background seems to call for nothing less than a complete reset for the US.

In a production co-directed by Tom Costello, the pair use minimal props and that sign is adorned with Bigfoot's furry mitts, clawed shoes and a mask with its mouth agape – all detachable and wielded to schlocky effect. It is sometimes slightly too on the nose, and I missed the emotional hit of the friendship in their LBJ story. But what's again almightily impressive is the duo's light touch in handling heavy subject matter.

Until 30 August. Then at Soho theatre, London, 7-26 September

Stage review

Human touch elevates skills of circus troupe

By a Thread

Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh

★★★★☆

Lyndsey Winship

You cannot move at the Edinburgh fringe for circus shows. There are so many people in this city who can climb a rope, hang upside down, swing on a trapeze – so how do you make a show special?

The Melbourne company One Fell Swoop Circus have worked out a way, sprinkling a bit of magic on their festival offering. It's a show that was originally made a decade ago but had its Edinburgh debut last year and was such a hit that they have brought it back. Like many of the best shows, it's really just one good idea, with all the juice thoroughly squeezed out of it across the course of an hour. That idea being: one giant rope, two pulleys, seven bodies, and everything they can do together.

It's a giant rope, two pulleys, seven bodies and everything they can do together

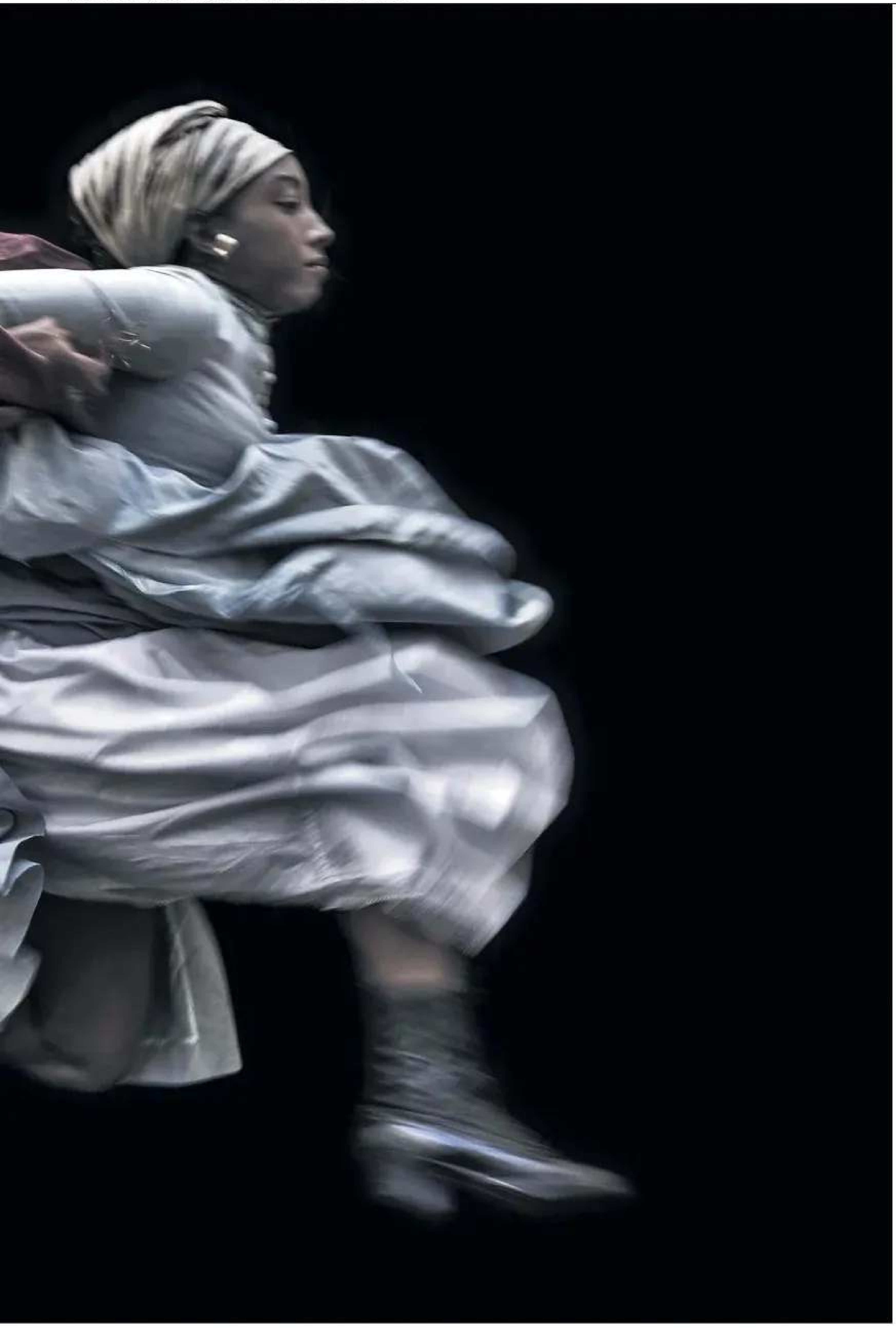
▲ *Tricks and personalities entwine as One Fell Swoop Circus aim high*

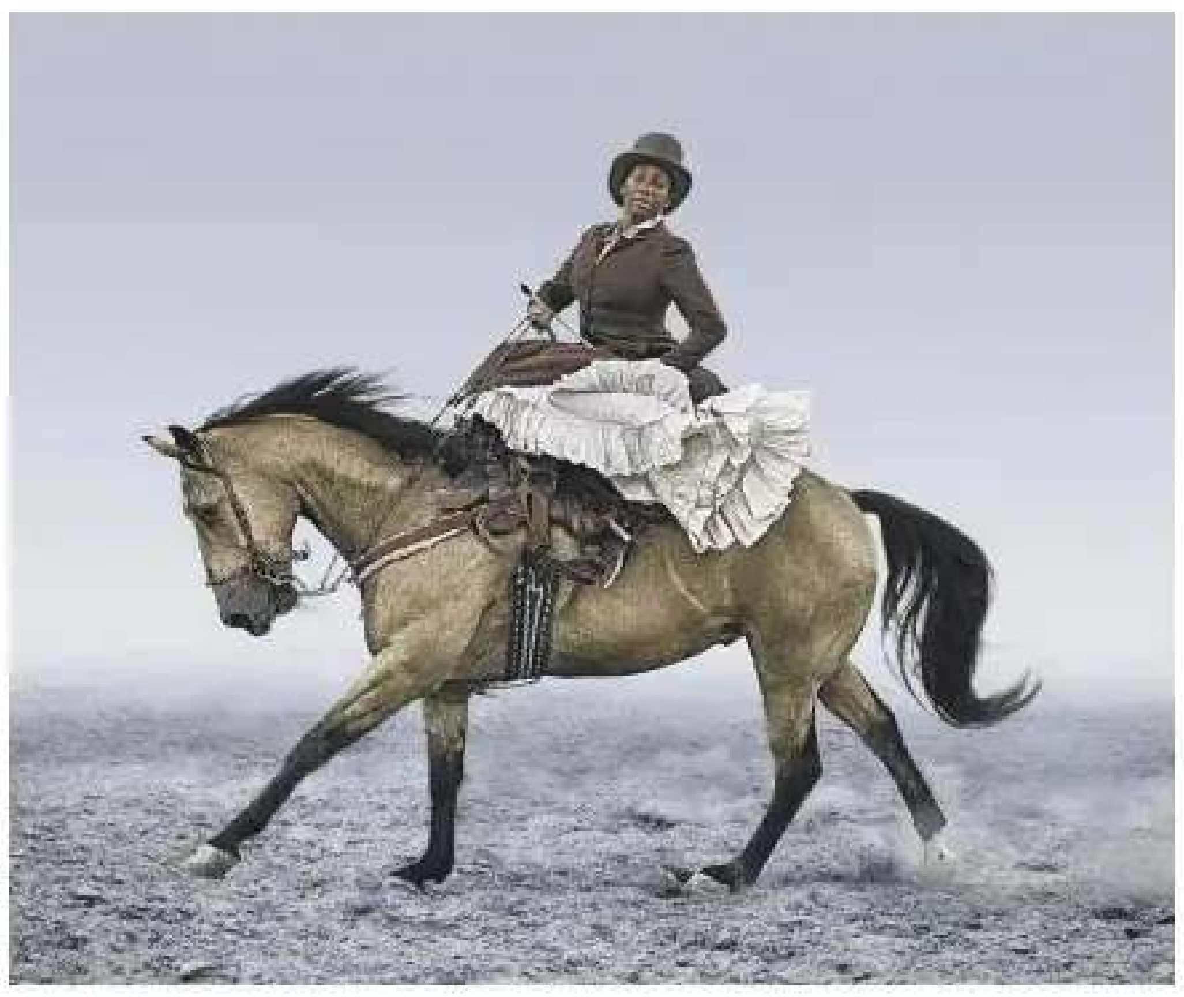
Looped from the ceiling, the rope becomes a slackline to walk across, a trapeze to swing on, a vertical climb, a diagonal slide, and much more. It's gently paced with a dreamy mood but steadily engrossing, the soulful soundtrack casting a spell. It becomes a great piece of theatre when the performers' personalities emerge – the mechanics of the rope plus the dynamics of the group.

Plus there's their individual skills, like Ellie Grow's mind-blowing handstands. She's more secure on two palms than most are on two feet, which means she can turn what could be a quick trick into choreography, with rhythm, timing and wit. Then there's a tender duet, metres up, that's not really about acrobatics but human connection, hands and eyes meeting, warmth and friendship. The emotion feels real, the tone perfectly judged, elevating these acrobats.

Until 30 August

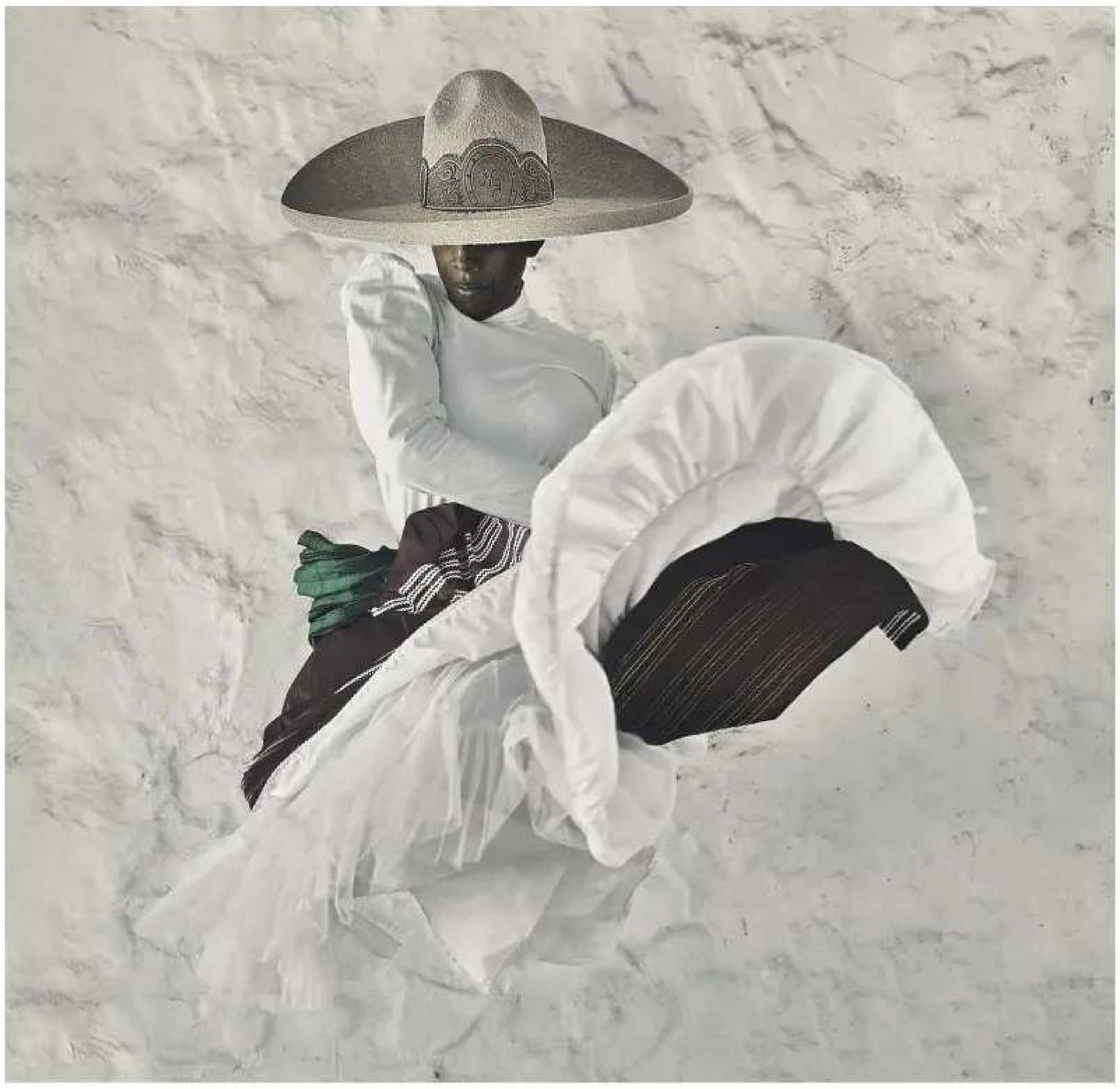
Eyewitness

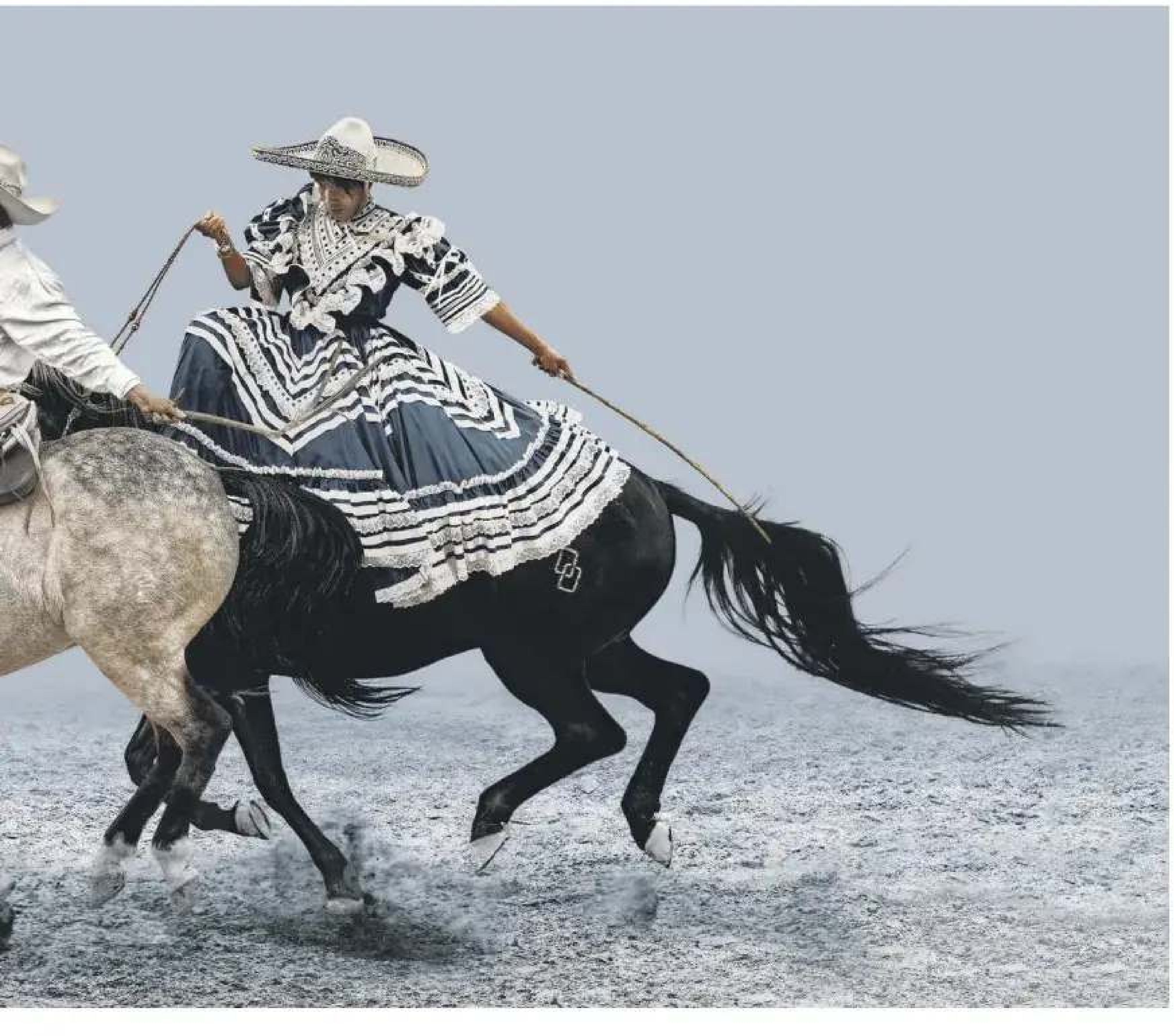


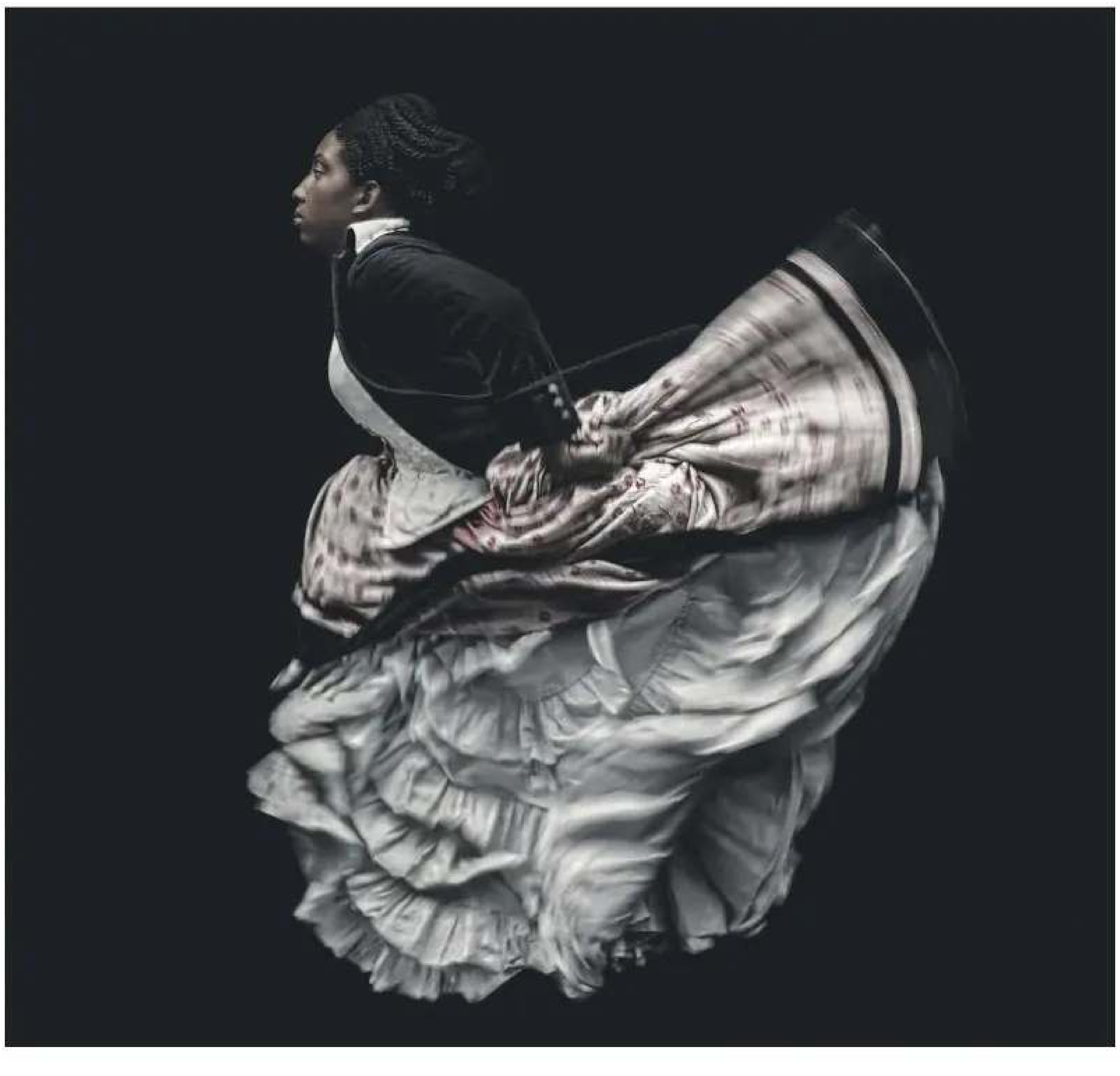


Giddy-up!

The American photographer and film-maker Ayana V Jackson is in the spotlight at this year's Arles photography festival. Using "equestrian embodiment", Jackson celebrates black, mestiza and Indigenous women who galloped through prejudice, confronting and subverting racist and sexist narratives in history along the way.







World

South Korea renews quest for military independence as Trump cuts joint drill

Raphael Rashid
Seoul

South Korea's president yesterday renewed his push to regain independent control of the military from the US in the event of war and urged faster progress in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines after Donald Trump's order to cut joint drills.

Trump instructed the Pentagon on Sunday night to "substantially reduce" this week's joint military exercises with South Korea, saying the nuclear-armed North "has been unthreatening and respectful" and that the US president had a "very good relationship with Kim Jong-un".

Lee Jae Myung said Seoul should proceed without disruption with the planned transfer, during his term, of wartime operational control, or Opcon, of South Korean forces from the US, a goal he and the government have long held.

Describing the US-South Korea alliance and independent defence as mutually reinforcing, Lee said in a cabinet meeting: "A strong alliance makes the foundation of security stronger, and strengthening our own capabilities increases our value and necessity as an ally."

The issue dates back to the Korean war, which ended in an armistice rather than a formal peace treaty in 1953, meaning the two Koreas remain technically at war. US troops have been stationed in South Korea ever since, and the country now hosts Camp Humphreys, the largest American military base outside the US. The US and South Korean militaries train and operate closely together, including through annual exercises such as those scheduled for this week.

▲ *Trump with Kim Jong-un, who he says treats him 'with great respect'*

Wartime Opcon – the authority to direct South Korean forces if fighting ever resumes – has rested with the US since the war began, exercised through the head of the allies' combined forces command, a position that has always been held by an American four-star general.

Seoul regained peacetime control of its own military in 1994, but the wartime authority has become a potent symbol of national sovereignty, and reclaiming it has been one of South Korea's foremost security goals for more than two decades, repeatedly delayed under successive governments.

This week's now-curtailed drills were meant to help certify South Korea's readiness to finally take it over, a process Lee has pushed to accelerate since taking office.

Lee also called for faster progress on South Korea's nuclear-powered submarine programme and on developing officers capable of integrated operations for future conflicts.

The renewed push follows Trump's call to make cuts to the planned 10 days of drills that started on Monday under the name Ulchi Freedom Shield, one of two main annual exercises held by South Korea and the US.

They were expected to involve about 18,000 South Korean troops, alongside US forces and personnel from 11 of the 18 member states of the United Nations Command (UNC), the multinational body that oversees the 1953 armistice that halted hostilities.

During questioning in the Oval Office on Monday, Trump claimed that North Korea's leader had responded to his order to the Pentagon but did not provide details.

When asked what stage the conversations with Kim were at, Trump said "it's very positive" but provided no further detail.

Trump doubled down on his praise for Kim, saying their ties had reduced tensions. He said: "You see, I'm actually making it much safer. Kim Jong-un has always treated me with great respect. I understand him. He understands me."

Trump has previously suspended major US-South Korean military exercises in pursuit of diplomacy with Kim. After his first summit with the North Korean leader in 2018, that year's Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercise was cancelled, while other drills were suspended or scaled back. The exercises were redesigned and resumed in modified form with changed names.

The US president acted despite warnings from US and South Korean military officials that Kim's regime is learning new battlefield tactics from sending North Korean troops to the Ukraine war.

Last week, South Korean and US military officials said Ulchi Freedom Shield drills would incorporate aspects such as the North Koreans' experience with drones on the battlefield.

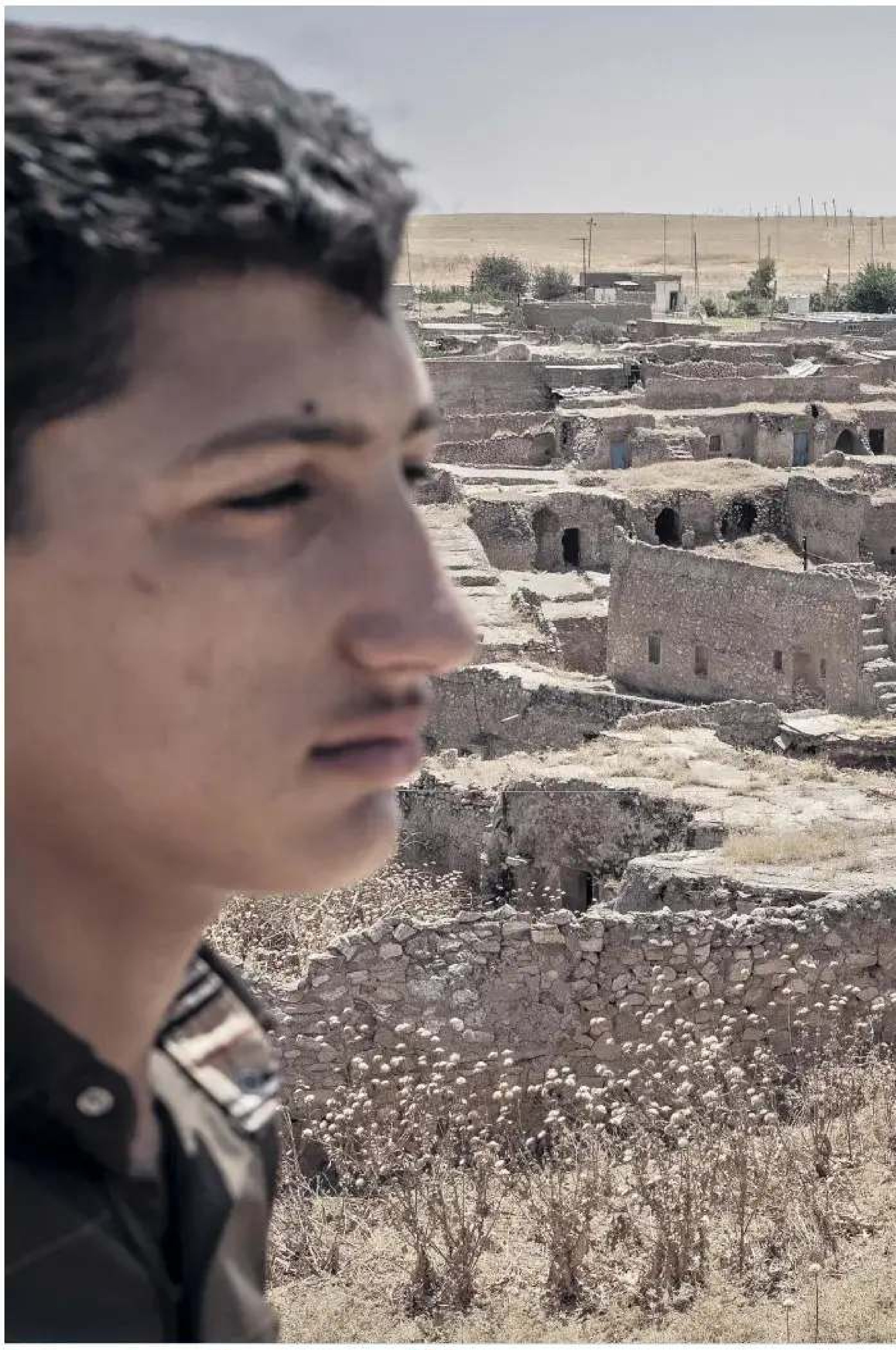
North Korea has deepened military ties with Russia since they signed a comprehensive strategic partnership pact in June 2024. Pyongyang is providing troops, artillery ammunition and ballistic missiles to support Moscow's war against Ukraine.

Col Ryan Donald, the public affairs director for US-led operations in South Korea, said: "They've taken those lessons they learned there and brought them back to North Korea, that changes the DPRK capability. Our training accounts for that threat … over the last five years it's continually evolved."

Yesterday, Seoul's presidential office said the drills did not reflect "any intention to attack North Korea or escalate tensions on the Korean peninsula".

▼ *South Korean military hardware on show during last year's exercises*

PHOTOGRAPH: KIM JAE-HWAN/SOPA IMAGES/ LIGHTROCKET/GETTY



Iraq's ghost villages

Why homes remain empty almost a decade after war

Chris Huby
Sinjar

The first thing that strikes visitors arriving in Faka, a small village in Sinjar district, northern Iraq, is the silence. No children play in the streets. No shops are open. Roofless houses stretch across the hillside, their walls pockmarked by shellfire, while weeds and wild grasses grow through collapsed living rooms.

A decade after Islamic State (IS) swept across the region, war remains visible everywhere. But according to the people who returned, another enemy has quietly taken its place.

"Today, the problem isn't only IS," says Rajab Mohammed, 62, the village's mukhtar or leader, standing above the ruins of Faka. "It's water. It's jobs. It's the future."

Abandoned houses now outnumber occupied ones. After the battle against IS, the battle to save the villages from drought and neglect has only just begun.

Before August 2014, about 150 families lived in Faka. When IS fighters seized the Sinjar region, residents fled as frontlines advanced across north-western Iraq. In August 2014, IS launched what the UN has recognised as a genocide against the ethnic minority Yazidi community. Thousands were killed and more than 6,000 people, mostly women and children, were abducted.

Marmots and crypto
US scientists turn to unorthodox funding
Page 28

Mushroom murders
Patterson appeals to Australian court
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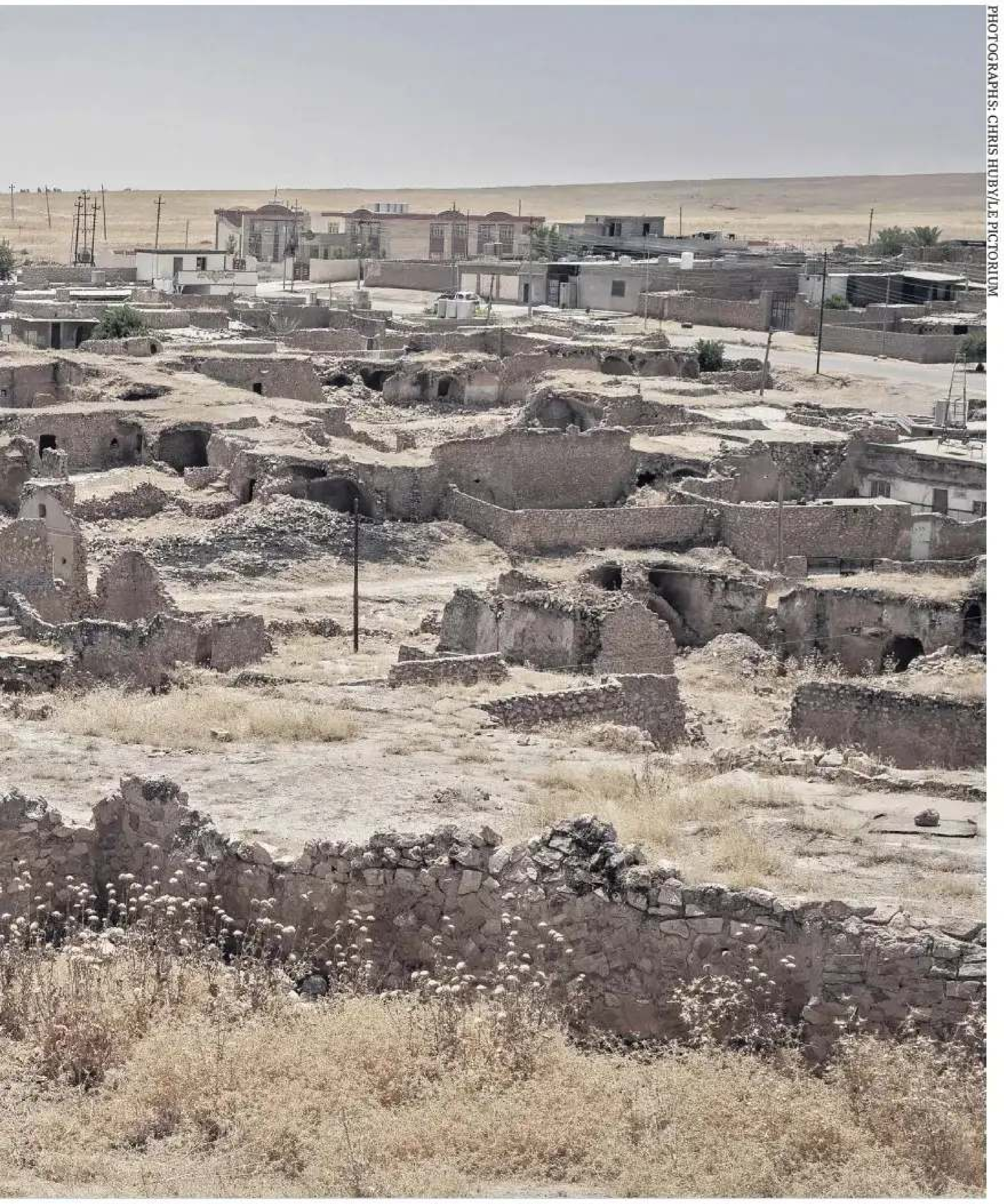

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS HUBY/LE PICTORIUM

▲ *In Tal Jado'o Bahjat Othman Hasan stands near a cave once used by IS. Left, deserted Faka village. Right, Smain on his family's burnt farm in Qazal Quyu and below, Akhil Ridha from Qubq laments a lack of jobs and homes*

While Faka and the nearby village of Qubq escaped the mass killings that devastated other nearby villages, coalition airstrikes and ground fighting left much of the area destroyed. Today, only about 20 families have returned. The rest have settled elsewhere, discouraged by the lack of reconstruction, jobs and basic services in a region where the climate crisis is making rural livelihoods such as farming increasingly precarious.

"People ask why families don't come back. The answer is simple. Where would they live? How would they earn a living?" says Aqil Ridha from Qubq.

The UN has ranked the country the fifth most vulnerable to declining water and food availability and extreme heat. Iraqi authorities project that by 2050 the country's average annual temperature will have risen by 2.5C, with 24 additional days a year crossing extreme heat thresholds. Temperatures in Sinjar this summer have approached 50C.

Rainfall has become increasingly erratic and summers are hotter and longer, while prolonged droughts are reducing agricultural production. The UN's special representative for Iraq has warned that the country will be able to meet only 15% of its water needs by 2035 if current trends continue.

In rural areas, where farming remains the principal source of income, the issues of climate and migration have become inseparable. The International Organization for Migration has recorded more than 186,000 people displaced by climate-related factors across Iraq as of September 2025.

In the village of Tal Jado'o, Bahjat Othman Hasan walks between ruined homes that have never been rebuilt. The roads remain little more than dirt tracks. Electricity is intermittent. Before the war, more than 200 people lived here. Today, barely 50 remain. "People didn't leave because they wanted to," he says. "They left because they couldn't live here any more."

Parts of the surrounding countryside are still contaminated by unexploded ordnance left behind after IS was driven out. But the greatest concern now lies beneath the surface, where groundwater levels continue to fall every year. "Years ago, you could reach water at around 10 metres," says Hasan. "Today, we must drill to around 25 metres. Every year it becomes more expensive."

Not far from Tal Jado'o, the village of Al-Sajea shows what happens once that tipping point is passed. Before the war, 37 families lived here. Today all 24 houses still standing are severely damaged, their rooms and courtyards overrun by the spiny, purple-flowered wild milk thistle that has colonised abandoned fields and ruins across the region. Nobody lives here any more.

"Everybody went to Tal Afar [a city in northern Iraq]," says Asef Hasan Ali, 43, one of the few people who still comes back at all. He lives in Tal Afar, but during the agricultural season he stays in a caravan parked at the edge of the village, close to the fields he still works. "For families, it's impossible: everything was bombed, nobody can live here."

Only days before our visit, 19-year-old Smain from the village of Qazal Quyu says his family's vegetable garden burned to the ground after a dust devil whipped across neighbouring fields, triggering an electrical spark that ignited dry vegetation. These rapidly rotating columns of hot air, common during Iraq's increasingly intense summers, are now another symbol of a changing climate.

The villages are not simply losing people, they are losing a generation. Village schools have fewer pupils every year. Those who complete secondary education rarely return after university. Others head directly into construction jobs in the cities of Mosul or Erbil, where wages, although modest, are more reliable than farming. "Almost all my friends want to leave," says Smain. "Sometimes I want to leave too."

> *'Today, the problem is not Islamic State. It's water. It's jobs. It's the future'*
>
> **Rajab Mohammed**
> *Faka*

Angry Syrians protest over death of man arrested by security forces

William Christou

Syrians have protested over the death of a man who was arrested and allegedly beaten by security forces, sparking widespread anger at a practice thought to have ended with the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

A crowd gathered in the city of Aleppo, demanding accountability for the security forces who are alleged to have carried out the torture, with participants holding signs and slogans such as: "Do not repeat the same oppression that we revolted against."

Mohammad Ghamira, a 29-year-old father of two and former volunteer in the White Helmets, had visited a police station in the coastal province of Latakia last week after an accusation of theft.

Ghamira emerged from the station in a critical condition, and died in hospital on Sunday from "complications from cerebral and gastrointestinal haemorrhaging" that "resulted from a beating he sustained after being detained", said Raed al-Saleh, the former head of the White Helmets and current Syrian minister of emergency and disaster management.

A picture of Ghamira pre-detention, smiling and healthy, next to another picture of him unconscious in a hospital bed with bruises on his body, went viral, sparking outrage.

Ghamira's parents told the police station chief prior to their son's detention that he had haemophilia, a disease which makes it hard to stop bleeding, and asked them not to beat him. Even with the warning, Ghamira was beaten, Issam Ghamira, his uncle, told Syrian state media.

The Syrian interior ministry promised accountability for Ghamira, forming a committee to investigate his death and detaining seven members of the interior ministry for questioning. The interior minister, Anas Khattab, vowed a "fair punishment" after the conclusion.

The interior ministry spokesperson Nour al-Din al-Baba acknowledged issues in the ministry, but promised justice. Al-Baba said the investigative committee met family members yesterday and informed them of the progress of the investigation.

Syrians for Truth and Justice documented 14 cases of individuals being tortured or dying in custody from June 2025 to June 2026, echoing the findings of the UN independent commission of inquiry in March, which documented torture and abuse in 30 official and makeshift detention facilities across Syria in 2025.

Pupil in Philippines kills fellow student and himself in livestreamed attack

Natasha May

A student livestreamed himself shooting and killing another pupil in a classroom in the southern Philippines yesterday before taking his own life, the second school attack in the country in less than two months.

The shooting took place at a school attached to Ateneo de Zamboanga University, a Catholic private institution in Zamboanga City on Mindanao island.

The city's mayor, Khymer Adan Olaso, told a local radio station that the shooter "managed to enter carrying a high-powered firearm and a .45-calibre pistol".

The interior secretary, Victor Remulla, confirmed that the suspect, who was in the ninth grade, had livestreamed the attack on social media. The attacker's Facebook account has since been disabled.

In the video, which was circulated by local media, the barrel of a gun is seen moving down a hallway before it is pointed into a classroom and fired. Children in school uniform are seen screaming and rushing to escape.

National police are now trying to "establish the motive behind the shooting, determine the ownership and source of the firearm used, and find out how it was brought inside the school campus," the interior ministry said.

Hours later, the Philippines' customs department said it had ordered the "preventive suspension" of an agent who owned the guns "allegedly used by the student involved".

The customs deputy chief of staff, Noel Bendijo, told Agence France-Presse customs staff had acted on intelligence from their own officers in Zamboanga. "The information is that he was the father of [the alleged shooter] … As for the actual firearms used and how the kid was able to access them, all of those are still under investigation," Bendijo said.

"We've also spoken with the party involved. He understands but of course he's also grieving because he also lost his child. That's a nightmare for any parent." When asked about the customs report, police said only that they were still investigating.

The Philippine president, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr, said in an online post: "We grieve with the families and the entire [school] community over a tragedy that should never have happened. I have directed our law enforcement agencies to conduct a thorough investigation into this incident and to determine what more must be done to prevent another family, another school and another community from suffering the same grief."

In June, at a public high school in Tacloban City, three students were killed and about 20 injured after two students opened fire on campus.

In response, the government banned an online game, GoreBox, after it was discovered that at least one of the alleged attackers regularly played it, and reopened a senate inquiry into online child safety.

The education department told a senate committee last month that more support was needed to prevent copycat attacks as more incidents of violence followed the shooting, including bomb threats, a stabbing and the recovery of firearms.

Additional reporting
Agence France-Presse

PHOTOGRAPH: ELOISA LOPEZ/ REUTERS

Monsoon blues Rising floodwaters in Manila. Government offices and schools in the Philippines' capital have been closed by the flooding, with many city roads impassable.

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Italy's security law criticised as man dies in police restraint

Angela Giuffrida
Bologna

If, before 19 July, few people in Italy beyond his family and friends knew who Abderrahim Fakir was, by the late afternoon of that day the final moments of his life were being watched across the country.

Video footage widely shared online showed him being handcuffed and forcibly restrained by police on a street in Pilastro, north-east Bologna.

Fakir, a 42-year-old small business owner born in Morocco, who had lived in Italy since he was a child, was pinned to the ground by two police officers as emergency health workers looked on. He repeatedly begged for help before his body stopped moving.

Fakir was pronounced dead at the scene. The cause of death is still being established, although an initial post-mortem indicated lung compression.

Outrage over Fakir's death prompted protests in Bologna and Rome and fuelled a tense national debate over the far-right government's approach to policing and immigration. It put a wide-ranging security bill enacted by Giorgia Meloni's ruling coalition under renewed scrutiny.

Fakir's is the first case in which a new legal shield, giving public officials greater protection from prosecution if it can be demonstrated they acted in self-defence or within the line of duty, has been invoked.

As a result, although prosecutors in Bologna are investigating the two officers and four healthcare workers in connection to an inquiry into involuntary manslaughter, they will not be formally registered as criminal suspects unless the authorities determine the use of restraint was unjustified.

The legal team for the two officers - who returned to work on Monday - deny excessive force was used, saying they complied with official protocol. Lawyers for the healthcare workers said they acted in strict accordance with emergency medical guidelines.

Critics of the legal shield have condemned it as giving too much power to the police, making it harder to hold them accountable.

Fabio Anselmo, the Fakir family's lawyer, said it risked "sabotaging" the investigation. "In this case, this is a rule that could effectively create impunity," he said.

In Pilastro, a working-class neighbourhood with a population of about 7,000, of whom 25% are immigrants, family and friends of Fakir worry that politics will interfere with justice.

A banner tied to railings on the corner of Via Italo Svevo, the street where he died, reads: "Truth and justice for Fakir - the state kills." Similar messages are scrawled on bus stops.

Fakir lived in another area of Bologna but often returned to Pilastro to see his brother, Mohamed, and friends from his childhood, including Mike El Canas, a fellow Moroccan national.

El Canas said Fakir had been with a group of friends, who described him as being in good spirits, on the night before his death and stayed in Pilastro overnight. "He was a good person, so kind and full of life," said El Canas.

It is unclear what happened in the hours before he died. Police said they responded to concerns from residents about a man behaving erratically and aggressively. They called the health services, telling staff he was "having a psychiatric episode". Other videos filmed by residents before police intervened showed Fakir in a state of extreme agitation and confusion. It later emerged he had been referred for mental health treatment in June.

In a letter published by La Repubblica, Barbara Spinelli, a lawyer who was assisting Fakir in renewing his residence permit, wrote that he feared being deported owing to the EU's "return hubs" migration pact, despite her reassurances, and felt sorry about having to lay people off because of a slowdown in business.

> ***'The Fakir story illustrates how words and these kinds of bills actually play out on the ground'***
>
> **Cecilia Sottilotta**
> *Politics professor*

Khadija, Fakir's sister, said he had confided in her about relationship difficulties but was otherwise always thinking of others. Exacerbating the family's grief was the way some far-right politicians and factions of Italy's rightwing press had dehumanised Fakir, seizing on drugs convictions in his youth and portraying him as just another immigrant causing trouble.

"Abderrahim helped those in need and was friendly and joked with everyone," she said. "This was Abderrahim." She said a witness told her Fakir had been agitated and asking for help. "They could have calmed him down with something. Why did he have to end up in the hands of the police like that?"

After crowdfunding to help cover legal costs, she said her family was hit with online comments accusing them of trying to make money. "I would pay €3m to have my brother back," she said. "All we want is truth and justice from the Italian state."

Many are too afraid to speak out. "The police have the power, a uniform that protects them, and we are nobodies," said El Canas. "But we must speak up, as otherwise, where will us ordinary citizens end up?"

With next year's general election approaching, the climate is expected to become more divisive as Meloni promotes her main political offerings: security and immigration.

Cecilia Sottilotta, an associate politics professor at the Università per Stranieri in Perugia, said: "The Fakir story illustrates how words and these kinds of bills actually play out on the ground. But these security measures have long been in the plans of Italy's far right, who have always insisted that the police should have a free rein.

"Now, the big picture is very important. Migration has been weaponised. Again, this is not new, but we will see more of it with elections coming up."

POLIZIA
GIUSTIZIA PER FAKIR

SIAMO TUTT3 ANTIRAZZIST3
ABOLIAMO LA POLIZIA!
ABDERRAHIM
GIUSTIZ
FAKIR

▲ *A protest over the death of Abderrahim Fakir in Bologna, Italy, last month. Left, a protester holds a sign calling for the police to be abolished and, below, Yossra, Fakir's niece, sits next to Khadija, his sister, and shows a family photo on her phone*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHELE LAPINI/ REUTERS

▲ *Krapfen at a mountain-top 'hut' have been popularised by influencers*

Tourists whip up row over cream pastries in Dolomites

Angela Giuffrida
Rome

Hundreds of people have overwhelmed a mountain peak in the Italian Dolomites in recent days, not for the panoramic views but in search of a creamy pastry, reigniting a debate about social media-driven tourism.

The visitors ventured en masse to the Friedrich August refuge - perched at 2,300 metres (7,500ft) above sea level, between Col Rodella and Passo Sella in Val di Fassa - some reportedly waking up at dawn or camping overnight, just to ensure they could buy a freshly baked *krapfen*, a traditional German pastry similar to a doughnut, before they ran out.

They had been enticed by food bloggers who had promoted the pastries, which cost up to €4 (£3.40) each, while eating them against the backdrop of the Dolomites, causing massive queues. Rather than deterring the crowds, images of the queues only brought in more people after they were shared online.

"We only came for this," one visitor told Rai News, while another said they were attracted by a post about *krapfen* on Instagram that was accompanied by "heavenly music".

A person who works at the refuge but who wanted to remain anonymous said it had been making the pastries for 30 years without any fuss, and blamed influencers for creating a "chaotic" situation. "We don't like it," they said.

Neither do the associations representing Italian mountain towns. The issue is not *krapfen*, they said, but the algorithms ruining the mountain environment by sending crowds into beauty spots. "The mountains are not a playground," said Marco Bussone, the president of Uncem, the national union of mountain communities.

Francesco Abbruscato, the president of the Veneto branch of the Italian Alpine Club, told Vita.it that image-driven tourism was eroding the true spirit of the mountains.

"The main problem is those who visit the mountains without knowing or respecting them," he said. "Until five or six years ago we did not witness overtourism in precise points or at certain moments in the Dolomites. Now there are iconic places where it is no longer possible to appreciate the beauty as we're surrounded by dozens of people who take selfies and are only there for that."

'A new normal'

Daily clean-up as Miami's seaweed problem worsens

▼ *Tons of sargassum wash up every summer at Miami Beach; below, specialised vehicles try to mix it with the sand or rake it up for removal*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALFONSO DURAN/THE GUARDIAN

Sara Sneath
Miami

Dealing with seaweed is the bulk of Chris Bumpus's job during the summer. As chief of conservation for Miami-Dade county's parks, recreation and open spaces department, Bumpus is in charge of cleaning sargassum off 17 miles of county beaches. But some days the odds are stacked against him and his team.

More and more sargassum, a kind of floating brown algae, has been washing up on the beaches of south Florida, west Africa, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.

Most mornings this time of year, a member of Bumpus's seaweed crew walks on to South Beach around 7am to take pictures of piles of the stemmy, spicy-mustard-coloured seaweed before a dozen tractors and specialised beach combing vehicles are put to work trying to integrate the sargassum into the sand or rake it out to be hauled away. "Back in July, the beach looked clean for about an hour," Bumpus said. That month alone, 9,000 tons of seaweed were removed from Miami-Dade county beaches, more than ever removed in a single month before.

"Hopefully, by October it will die down," he said. "July is always the worst. It's been a heavy season."

Before the clean-up begins, a crew has marked any new sea turtle nests so they are not harmed by the sargassum removal. The county holds a permit with the Florida environmental protection department for its employment of heavy equipment to corral the seaweed. The permit prohibits that equipment being used during turtle nesting hours, from 30 minutes before sunset until sunrise.

Miami-Dade county spends $3m per year on sargassum removal, more than any other county in Florida, Bumpus said.

The Florida Keys, however, can see heavier accumulations of sargassum because of the inlet-like shape of their beaches, he said. For centuries, sargassum has grown in the Sargasso Sea, a region of the North Atlantic encircled by ocean currents that keep the seaweed concentrated there. But in 2011 scientists saw the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt form for the first time, stretching from west Africa to the Gulf of Mexico. Scientists say several factors contribute to the blooms, including nitrogen and phosphorus from rivers - such as the Amazon, Congo and Mississippi - warmer water temperatures and ocean circulation.

Since 2011, the amount of sargassum has doubled every five years. As a result, larger and denser mats of sargassum have been washing up in Mexico, Florida and the Caribbean. This summer, satellite imagery showed the second highest amount of sargassum in the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt at 33.5m tons, behind 2025 when the seaweed biomass reached 38m tons.

The climate crisis has also played a role in the proliferation of sargassum, said Brian LaPointe, a research professor at Florida Atlantic University Harbor Branch, who has been studying sargassum since 1982. "As we see more ocean warming, we get more evaporation and that drives these extreme rain events that essentially flush more nutrients from land into the ocean," he said. "So that's an indirect effect that can increase nutrient supply to sargassum."

Miami-Dade county first began efforts to address its seaweed problem in 2019. In July, county commissioners voted to petition the state to allow the county more flexibility to use beach raking equipment in more areas.

"I think this year has been kind of a gamechanger in that we've seen major inundations here in south Florida, more than we've ever really seen in past years, and comparable to what's been happening in the Caribbean, Mexico and the Dominican Republic," LaPointe said.

Sargassum serves as a critical habitat in the open ocean, but that changes as it comes ashore. "What we're seeing is that as this excessive amount of sargassum comes ashore it's affecting coral reefs and seagrass beds and creating dead zones, which strips the oxygen out of the water," LaPointe said. "That's why we're getting these odours of hydrogen sulfide, which presents a human health risk."

More aggressive seaweed removal efforts might be necessary, but these measures will not address the underlying causes of increasingly massive blooms in the ocean. LaPointe said: "People are realising this isn't going away. It's getting worse. It's the new normal. It's not only treating the symptoms but doing more research on the land-based nutrient sources that we can do something about."

Marmot study saved by crypto and OnlyFans after Trump cuts

Oliver Milman

Scientists who turned to the OnlyFans website to help save long-running research into marmots have raised more than $100,000 (£74,000) after harnessing the support of another very modern funding avenue - cryptocurrency.

The 64-year project into the continuous study of marmots - stout, ground-dwelling rodents that are the largest members of the squirrel family - across the west of the US was facing termination after Donald Trump's administration imposed science funding cuts.

In desperation, in June researchers decided to put the marmots on OnlyFans, the subscription platform mainly used for pornography, to raise funds.

Since then, posts on the account, named OnlyMarms, have shown marmots scurrying across rocky landscapes and entering their burrows, rather than anything sexually explicit. "Our goal isn't to sexualise the marmots," said Daniel Blumstein, a professor at UCLA. "It's to celebrate the marmots."

This effort raised a modest $6,000 for the marmots but a further, much larger funding boost for the project recently materialised in the form of a marmot-themed cryptocurrency. A new "memecoin" named $OnlyMarms was created by supporters of the project who donated all transaction fees to the study.

It raised more than $88,000 in two weeks. Along with traditional donations, the research programme has gained more than $100,000 in funding, enabling it to continue.

"It's been incredible to see and it's a relief that the research can continue for another year," said Julien Martin, a University of Ottawa researcher who leads the project with Blumstein. "I'm completely amazed that this internet culture that I barely know of has raised so much money. It's fascinating and shocking to me."

The memecoin was created by an unknown online community on the Solana blockchain and Martin initially thought it was a scam before accepting that it could raise funds for the study. He said it was ironic that researchers were turning to cryptocurrency, which has netted Trump about $635m through his own memecoin, to make up for science funding slashed by his administration.

The US president has sought to shrink federal scientific funding via the National Science Foundation and has frozen hundreds of millions in grants in order to reshape the system to suit political and ideological goals. In April, the administration fired the 22-person board that independently oversaw the NSF.

▲ *The study of marmots, the largest in the squirrel family, began in 1962*

This shift in priorities has strangled funding for the marmot study at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, a nonprofit field station in the Rocky Mountains near Crested Butte, Colorado.

The study of yellow-bellied marmots began in 1962 and has grown to be one of the longest-running animal monitoring projects in the world.

The documentation of the marmots is important, Martin said, as it illustrates their changing environment as the world heats up from the burning of fossil fuels.

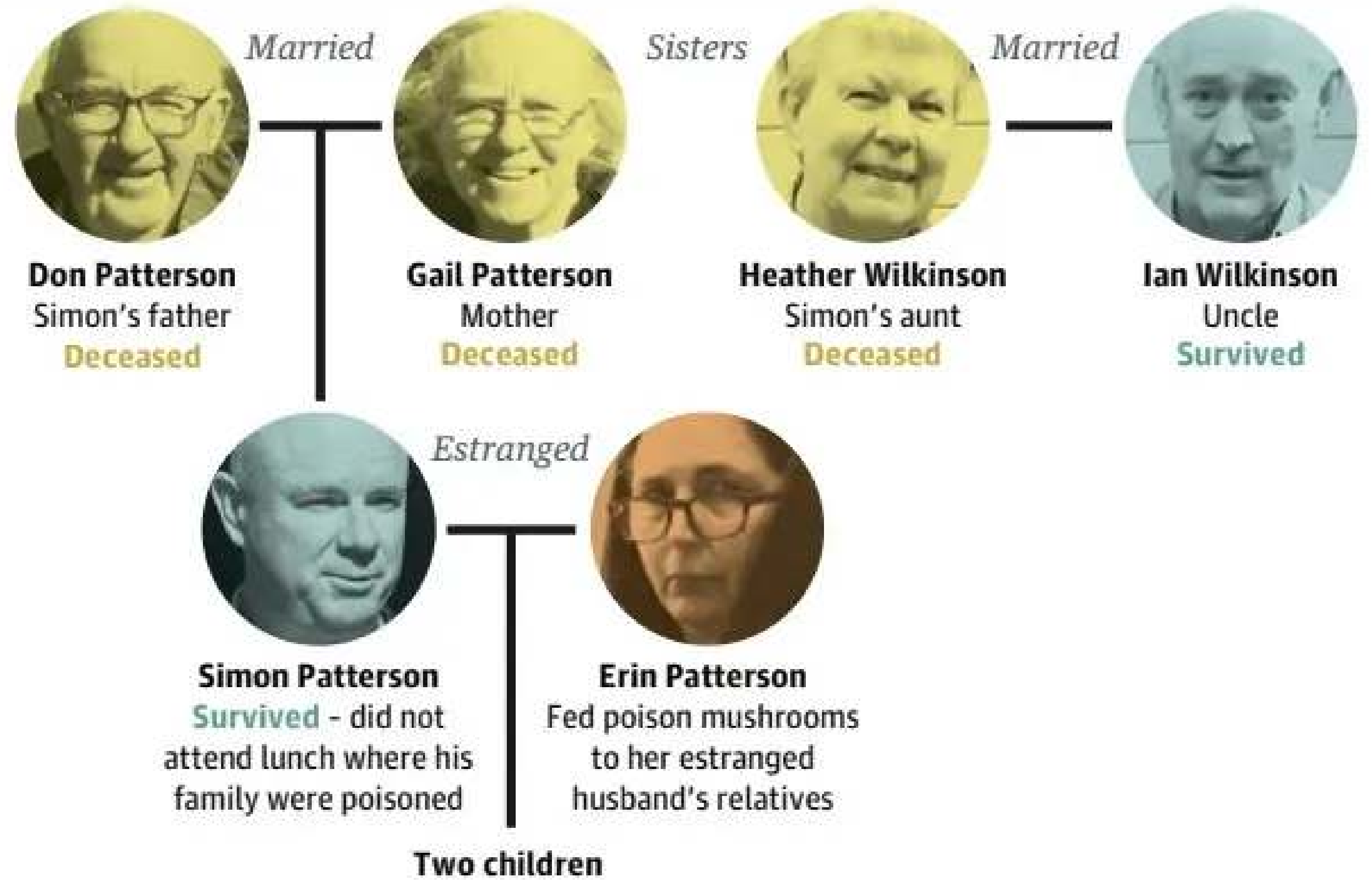
Martin said continued monitoring was needed to ascertain the impact of the climate crisis on marmots and other wildlife. Although the injection of OnlyFans and crypto cash will keep the marmot project alive for now, he acknowledged it was not an adequate substitute for government funding.

Erin Patterson arriving at court in Victoria, Australia, in August last year. Above: mushrooms growing outside her home in Leongatha, right, where she served a meal containing toxic mushrooms to relatives, below

PHOTOGRAPH: JASON EDWARDS/GETTY

Mushroom killer

Erin Patterson's appeal against her conviction begins



Images: AAP/AP, Supplied/Facebook

Adeshola Ore
Nino Bucci

It was a Sunday lunch in a sleepy Australian town that was at the heart of one of the country's most high-profile murder trials. A central question fascinated people around the world: did Erin Patterson deliberately serve her in-laws poisoned beef wellington on 29 July 2023?

More than a year after a jury found Patterson had murdered them, an Australian court will now consider whether her convictions should be quashed and if she should remain in prison for life without the possibility of parole.

Today three judges of Victoria's highest court will begin hearing two appeals - one by Patterson, the other by the state's director of public prosecutions (DPP) - in the triple murder case that attracted intense media attention.

Patterson will appeal against her convictions, and the DPP will appeal against the sentence handed down to her, arguing it was "manifestly inadequate".

In September, Patterson was sentenced to life imprisonment with a non-parole period of 33 years for the murders of her estranged husband's parents, Don and Gail Patterson, and his aunt, Heather Wilkinson. She was also convicted of the attempted murder of Wilkinson's husband, Ian Wilkinson, who survived the lunch after spending weeks in hospital.

Patterson, who maintained her innocence throughout the 10-week trial last year, is not expected to attend court in person. The three court of appeal judges, who will consider the arguments, are expected to reserve their decision in both appeals. They will hand down their judgments at a later date.

In November, Patterson, 51, filed an appeal against her convictions but did not appeal against her sentence. The appeal is on seven grounds, including the "fundamental irregularity" around sequestering the jury in the same hotel as police and media representatives, and a claim that her cross-examination during the trial was "unfair and oppressive".

While considering the verdict, the jury was sequestered in a hotel in a regional town where police and journalists also stayed. According to reports, the matter was raised with authorities by her lawyers at the time, but no concerns about the process were raised during the trial.

The appeal documents allege the sequestering issue "fatally undermined the integrity of the verdicts" and argue for the quashing of the convictions and the ordering of a retrial.

Patterson is also appealing on the grounds that mobile phone tower evidence, as well as evidence of death cap mushroom sightings near her home, should not have been heard in the trial. The court last year heard that analysis of her mobile phone records revealed she may have visited two locations soon after death cap mushroom sightings were reported.

She is also arguing that evidence from her Facebook "friends", who met Patterson through a true-crime group, should not have been allowed as it was not relevant. Patterson told a Facebook group chat she wanted "nothing to do" with her parents-in-law, according to messages shown in court.

The other four grounds of appeal relate to Patterson's cross-examination by prosecutors over five days, as well as issues over other evidence and the opening and closing addresses of the prosecution.

Patterson's legal team argue that the prosecution's closing address caused a "substantial miscarriage of justice". While the prosecution maintained there was no evidence of motive, Patterson's legal team claim that this changed in the closing address to imply a motive for murder.

33

The number of years Erin Patterson is facing in prison before she is considered eligible for parole

If Patterson is successful in her appeal, the court will quash her convictions and could order a retrial or acquit her.

Separately, the DPP is appealing against her sentence, arguing that "the sentence imposed on Patterson is manifestly inadequate" and that the trial judge erred in finding she was likely to spend "years to come" in solitary confinement when allowing for the possibility of parole.

During a pre-sentencing hearing last August, the DPP argued that Patterson should not be granted a parole period because of the nature of her crimes, which Justice Christopher Beale, the judge, agreed were "horrendous".

While the defence and prosecution agreed that Patterson should receive a life sentence, her then defence barrister, Colin Mandy SC, argued Beale should consider the onerous conditions of her conditions in custody.

At the time of the pre-sentence hearing, Patterson had in effect spent the past 15 months in solitary confinement, the court heard.

Beale found that Patterson would continue to be held in those conditions for years to come for her own protection, owing to the high-profile nature of her crimes.

If the DPP's appeal is successful, Patterson's non-parole period could be extended or she could be sentenced to life with no release.

During Patterson's trial, the prosecution did not put forward an alleged motive but pointed to the deteriorating relationship between Patterson and her estranged husband, Simon, in the months before the fatal lunch.

Patterson told the court she had accidentally served beef wellingtons containing death cap mushrooms to her lunch guests in July 2023. She raised the possibility that mushrooms she had foraged may have been in a Tupperware container which also contained store-bought dried mushrooms she said she had used in the meal.

The jury ultimately sided with the prosecution, finding Patterson had deliberately included death cap mushrooms with the intention of killing her four guests.

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10728.04	5786.40	53374.34	67460.73	-0.0003	-0.0009

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

Business

UK wage growth slows as job vacancies reach five-year low

Richard Partington
Senior economics correspondent

Wage growth in the UK slowed in June and vacancies hit a five-year low as workers came under pressure from a renewed cost of living squeeze amid the economic impact of the Iran war.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show average growth in total earnings, including bonuses, fell to 4.1% in the three months to June, down from 4.4% in the three months to May. The pay slowdown could deter the Bank of England from raising interest rates this year, some economists suggested.

Liz McKeown, the ONS director of economic statistics, said the data showed "some softening" in the jobs market despite a broadly unchanged picture overall, in a potential sign of stabilisation after a sharper slowdown earlier this year.

"Regular wage growth has remained broadly stable in recent months. However, private sector pay growth has continued to ease, while public sector pay growth remains elevated due to the timing of the latest NHS pay awards," she said.

Pay growth excluding bonuses strengthened slightly from 3.4% to 3.5%. City economists had forecast the rate would remain unchanged. The number of workers on company payrolls fell by 13,000 in July, matching the decline in June after larger falls in previous months.

Earnings growth, excluding bonuses, in the private sector slowed to 2.8%, the weakest growth rate since October 2020. Pay growth in the public sector strengthened to 6.1%, reflecting the payment of NHS staff pay rises earlier in 2026 compared with 2025, which distorts the figure.

Vacancies fell to a five-year low as small businesses said they were facing a rise in employment costs. There were 707,000 in May to July, a drop of 6,000 compared with the previous three months, and the lowest level since spring 2021.

"Ongoing weakness in private sector hiring and wage growth suggests the bar is still relatively high for a rate hike in 2026, barring a severe and prolonged spike in energy prices," said James Smith, a developed markets economist at the Dutch bank ING.

Modupe Adegbembo, an economist at the investment bank Jefferies, said there was little in the data to make the Bank of England more worried about labour market-driven inflation pressure. "Whilst the adjustment still looks orderly rather than disorderly, we think the BoE will remain cautious around the state of the labour market," he added.

> *'The bar is still relatively high for a rate hike in 2026'*
>
> **James Smith**
> *Economist, ING*

Money market pricing shows City economists expect one increase in UK interest rates by the end of the year, which would lift the Bank rate from 3.75% to 4%.

The headline rate of unemployment remained unchanged at 4.9%. City economists had forecast a drop to 4.8%.

The snapshot comes as households face a fresh hit to living standards as the fallout from the Middle East conflict affects the world economy. Official figures due today are expected to show that a rise in energy bills drove UK inflation close to 3% in July.

Annual growth in earnings after taking account of inflation was 1.3% in the three months to June. However, workers could face a squeeze as rising inflation approaches the slowing rate of earnings growth.

The figures highlight the challenge for Andy Burnham's government to ease the pressure on households before a difficult autumn budget.

Britain buys four-fifths of its fruit from overseas

Reliance on food imports puts UK at risk, report warns

Joanna Partridge

The UK is vulnerable to food price shocks because of its dependence on imports of fruit and vegetables from countries even more exposed to the climate crisis, researchers say.

Much of the country has sweltered under heatwaves this year, with the hot, dry conditions damaging crops and reducing yields of domestic produce. However, the UK relies on countries under even greater climate pressure for supplies of some of its most popular fresh foods, according to a report from the Food Foundation charity published today.

While the UK generally produces enough grains, meat, milk and eggs to cover its needs, it has one of the lowest food self-sufficiency ratios among large western European countries. About 40% of its food is imported, including 47% of its vegetables and 80% of its fruit.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has forecast that without action to improve resilience, higher temperatures will cause lower yields, heat stress for plants, and poorer quality fruit, vegetables and other crops, especially across the Mediterranean, north Africa and South and Central America.

The Cold Chain Federation industry body, and top food experts, also sounded the alarm in recent months that extreme weather, fuel shortages or cyber-attacks were all creating risks for supplies of food into the UK.

The Food Foundation is calling on the government to invest more in helping British farmers adapt to the changing climate to increase domestic production.

Five of the UK's nine most-purchased fruits can be grown domestically – including apples, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and pears – but the UK grows less than 40% of domestic consumption for four of those.

For vegetables, only carrots reach a high level of self-sufficiency (94%), while the UK could grow more of the most popular vegetables, including tomatoes, mushrooms, peppers, cucumbers, onions, broccoli and green beans, only about half of which are produced domestically.

Mike Ashley tightens grip on Hugo Boss with 48% stake

Alex Daniel

The retail billionaire Mike Ashley has signalled that his summer shopping spree may be far from over, after he increased his stake in Hugo Boss to nearly half.

Ashley's Frasers Group, which last week bought the Harvey Nichols department stores for a reported £40m, increased its shareholding in the German fashion house to 48%, just short of taking full control.

In June, Frasers made a nearly €2bn (£1.73bn) takeover offer for the luxury group, but its board rejected the bid as "inadequate" and urged shareholders not to accept it.

The new, higher stake is a result of 17.6% of shareholders accepting Ashley's offer, which amounted to €38 a share. That bid reflected only a 4% premium to Hugo Boss's shares when it was tabled.

Axel Rudolph, an analyst at the investing platform IG, said it was "another major step towards gaining control" of Hugo Boss. Ashley's new shareholding put Frasers "firmly in the driving seat as it looks to increase its influence", he added.

Frasers, which has stocked Hugo Boss products in its stores for years, has taken an increasingly activist role since it first took a stake in the German group in June 2020. It has pushed for change at the company, which has faced struggling sales in women's clothing and sluggish demand in its Chinese market.

The Hugo Boss chair, Stephan Sturm, said yesterday: "We appreciate Frasers Group's continued long-term commitment to Hugo Boss and look forward to maintaining a constructive relationship with them as our single largest shareholder."

Ashley has been building his interests in luxury fashion in recent years with the Flannels chain and a large stake in the British handbag maker Mulberry.

The businessman also recently became the fifth-biggest shareholder of Burberry, taking a 4.2% stake last month that was worth about £160m. The 170-year-old trenchcoat maker has struggled amid a global slowdown in demand for luxury goods, and last year said it would cut 1,700 jobs after posting a £66m loss.

▲ *Hugo Boss's autumn/winter collection in Milan. The German fashion house has had sluggish sales*
PHOTOGRAPH: FERDA DEMIR/WIREIMAGE

Ashley bought Harvey Nichols out of administration last week after the chain, which has 13 stores and 1,200 employees, said it could run out of money if it did not find new funding.

If he did eventually take control of Hugo Boss, it would add another brand to the group that already owns the Frasers department stores, formerly House of Fraser, as well as Sports Direct and the bicycle retailer Evans Cycles.

€2bn

Ashley's Frasers Group's takeover offer for Hugo Boss in June, which its board rejected as 'inadequate'

UK retailers too slow to pass on fuel price falls, watchdog finds

PA Media

Some petrol stations are still not passing on changes in wholesale prices quickly enough and more than 1,000 warning letters have been sent to retailers failing to give prices to the Fuel Finder service, the UK competition watchdog has said.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) raised concerns in its latest quarterly update on the fuel market over "passive pricing strategies" used by the majority of retailers, which it said were helping to keep profit margins high amid soaring cost pressures on drivers caused by the Iran war.

It found some retailers did not immediately pass on falls in wholesale diesel prices to drivers between May and June, which could have boosted competition in the market.

The CMA said that while costs overall at fuel pumps fell in June, prices remained significantly higher than before the Middle East conflict and retailer profit margins were either at or above the historically high levels of 2025.

It did not find any evidence of profiteering among fuel retailers on the back of the war in Iran.

The CMA also said it had sent 1,166 letters to retailers and 53 compliance notices since April about failure to register with the government-run Fuel Finder price comparison scheme.

It said about 97% of petrol stations are registered with the scheme, accounting for about 99% of the fuel sold in the UK, and it had not had to issue any fines yet.

The watchdog also said it would carry out a more detailed review of the road fuel market in the autumn to ensure customers were paying a fair price for fuel across the UK.

The CMA's chief executive, Sarah Cardell, said: "We will continue to monitor prices and margins closely and expect any reductions in wholesale prices to be rapidly and fully passed on to drivers.

The AA's president, Edmund King, said: "Clearly, some fuel retailers are prepared to pass on lower costs promptly and help their customers.

"But many more, including large numbers of supermarkets, are not."

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Business view
Nils Pratley

Time for decisions on Britain's gas supply risks

The penny is dropping in government. Britain, even in rapid energy transition mode, will still need a lot of gas in the years ahead – and needs to know how the gas will arrive.

It could hardly be otherwise when there are 24m households with a gas connection, largely for heating, and the pace of heat pumps adoption is miserable. Last year gas comprised about a third of the UK's overall energy needs. Though annual consumption is in decline, the days of peak use during a bleak midwinter can still be as high as ever.

The difficulty has been getting ministers to focus on the combination of declining North Sea volumes (about 40% of supply), skimpy levels of gas storage, and limited capacity for importing the stuff via tanker. Until now, the default position under successive governments has been that the market will provide.

A scary report from the energy system operator last November, however, warned of "an emerging risk" to gas supplies at the turn of the decade if a big piece of infrastructure, such as one of only three terminals for importing liquefied natural gas, were to be offline in a cold snap. Now comes the government's formal response.

> *It is hard to find anybody who can describe what has been done in response to the disruption of global LNG supplies*

Or, rather, it's half a response since this was an interim version cloaked in the language of "more analysis needed". But one significant shift was reasonably clear: the government thinks it will probably have to intervene to ensure sufficient gas capacity and infrastructure is in place. That could mean contracts to underpin more storage, more import terminals or something else.

There are three observations to make about this report. First, ministers need to hurry up and decide what they want, as opposed to repeatedly describing the menu of options. If, for example, regeneration of Centrica's Rough storage site off the coast of Yorkshire is one solution, that £2bn project won't happen overnight. Neither could alternative onshore or offshore storage facilities, or even floating offshore import terminals, be summoned immediately. If the 2030 risk of running short of gas is real, get on with it.

Second, what about this winter? That challenge wasn't mentioned. "Swift and decisive action is also required to address potential near-term challenges," said Jon Butterworth, chief executive of National Gas, which runs the gas network, back in February. While he added that "work is already well under way," it is hard to find anybody who can describe what has been done in response to the disruption to global LNG supplies.

Centrica has not been injecting gas into Rough this year because it can't make the finances stack up, meaning Britain will enter winter with even less storage than usual. In the meantime, continental European storage, which Britain normally taps via interconnectors during the cold months, is projected to be lower than average for Hormuz-related reasons. And wholesale gas prices are rising, anticipating global competition for LNG cargoes.

Third, yesterday's report was not about North Sea policy but represented another reason to approve the Jackdaw gasfield. It would, after all, be bizarre to outline a potential supply crunch that has been caused, in large part, by growing reliance on imports and then disallow a field that will make the problem slightly smaller. Jackdaw will account for about 6% of domestic North Sea gas volumes and can be operating in time for winter. Whatever the awkward "optics", there is another decision to make soon.

‘Feudal relationship’

Former tenants of Stonegate speak out over ‘mistreatment’

Rob Davies

‘We’re pleased to welcome Stonegate Pub Partners as a sponsor for the Great British Pub Awards 2026,” read a post on the event’s Facebook page. Within minutes it had backfired.

“Must be 1st April again,” said one commenter. “This is like Pontius Pilate being appointed child welfare ambassador,” said another. Other comments about Britain’s largest pub company were significantly less polite.

Days earlier, Stonegate had been named as the subject of an investigation by the industry regulator, the Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA), over alleged mistreatment of the tenants who run more than 3,000 of its venues.

Melissa Phillips’ father, known locally as “Phil”, was one of them. After taking over a more or less derelict venue in Basingstoke, Hampshire, he turned it into a highly successful football pub that the company cited to trainee publicans as a success story.

But after he began suffering from the effects of Alzheimer’s, he lost his ability to keep on top of the business. “He would pay bills twice or not at all and would sometimes fall asleep during meetings with the area sales manager,” said Phillips.

Stonegate knew of his condition from 2022, she claims, yet the process of allowing him to exit the tenancy agreement dragged on until 2024, weighing him down with added stress and financial burdens. “The whole process ruined him,” said Phillips. “They robbed us of the last two good years we had with him.”

As part of the agreement that eventually allowed Phil to exit the tenancy, Stonegate agreed to fund some repairs but said he owed £89,500 in “dilapidations” – costs relating to building damage – as well as trade debt and rent.

Phillips said much of this debt was amassed during a period in which Stonegate knew her father no longer had the capacity to make financial decisions.

This year a survey of pub tenants by the PCA found that Stonegate, which also owns the Slug & Lettuce, Be At One and Walkabout chains, was considered by tenants to be by far the worst large company to lease a pub from. It scored a satisfaction rating of 39%.

The next worst was Punch Pubs, with a rating of 55%, while Greene King and Admiral Taverns scored 71% and 72% respectively.

Stonegate is wrestling with a £3.8bn debt pile, mostly racked up when it bought Ei, formerly Enterprise Inns, for £3bn just before the pandemic in 2019, taking on thousands of tenanted pubs in the process.

Stonegate is the UK’s largest pub company

39%

The satisfaction rating given by pub tenants to Stonegate, named the worst big group to lease a pub from

£650m

The amount Stonegate has lost in the past three years, though it reported record half-year profits in June

Stonegate is domiciled in the Cayman Islands and ultimately owned by TDR Capital, a private equity firm that is the majority owner of Asda.

The pub group has lost £650m in the past three years, but in June it reported its strongest first-half profits ever, saying adjusted earnings were up from £17m to £201m in the 28 weeks to 12 April.

However, the company has struggled to shake off complaints about its behaviour in “tied” tenancies, complex agreements under which businesses such as Stonegate lease the premises to a publican.

Under these deals the publican is meant to receive benefits such as a lower rent and support with repairs and upkeep in exchange for buying certain products – most notably beer – exclusively from the pub company. In theory, everyone wins.

In practice, tenant publicans and their loved ones say they have been left severely out of pocket and mentally exhausted by their interactions with Stonegate.

The Guardian has spoken to more than 10 pub landlords who claim to have suffered poor treatment by Stonegate. Some were unable to tell their full story, saying they had signed non-disclosure agreements with the company. Others simply wanted to avoid further stress.

The tenant of the Black Horse, Chester-le-Street, and the Nine Pins, Gateshead, said he and his wife were “relentlessly pursued” by Stonegate after he had to close the two pubs when she was diagnosed with cancer.

Stonegate is understood to believe it had little choice after attempts to recover a £77,000 debt were unsuccessful.

But the former tenant said the company had “ruined” the couple, who requested not to be named, including instructing bailiffs to visit their home, which he said risked disrupting his wife’s care.

In a letter to Stonegate’s debt recovery team, seen by the Guardian, he wrote: “There are absolutely zero assets available for seizure, making physical enforcement completely futile while remaining highly dangerous to my wife’s health.”

Stonegate said the terms of its agreements with tenants meant that “our interests are directly aligned”.

It added: “The reality is that we are investing record amounts in our properties, tenant applications are at record highs and publican tenures are at record lengths.”

However, some tenants spoke of being saddled with huge repair bills by the terms of their contracts, or of the company dragging its feet when it was contractually supposed to perform the work.

Richard Martin, the former tenant of the Museum Street Tavern in York, said Stonegate’s failure to carry out repairs to the pub’s dwelling in time for the wet winter period exposed his twin daughters to black mould for several months before the problem was fixed.

Rachael Maskell, the Labour and Co-operative MP for York Central, who has intervened on behalf of Stonegate tenants before, wants to see total reform of the tied tenancy system rather than individual investigations such as the one that the PCA is carrying out into Stonegate. “It’s a feudal relationship at best,” she said. “It entraps you into a financial loss situation, where you cannot make the best of your business but you’re tied to a failed business model.”

Stonegate said it was “cooperating fully and constructively with the PCA”. It added: “Should the investigation identify any areas where we need to make operational improvements, we will act to implement them immediately. Isolated case studies do not represent the success of our broader estate.”

▲ *Melissa Phillips outside Laarsens pub in Basingstoke, which her father used to run. She said Stonegate ‘robbed us of the last two good years we had with him’ after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s* PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN/THE GUARDIAN

▲ *Traders expect increased defence spending will drive borrowing higher*

Governments rocked by cost of borrowing as hopes fade of end to Iran war

Julia Kollewe
Graeme Wearden

Government borrowing costs in several advanced economies continued to rise yesterday, reaching levels not seen in decades, as hopes of an end to the US-Iran war faded.

Concerns about the inflation outlook worsened after a ceasefire ended on Monday night without an agreement and with no progress on the reopening of the strait of Hormuz.

Donald Trump’s threat to bomb Oman if they “get in the way” of negotiations helped to push oil to more than $91 a barrel. Investors fear higher energy prices will push inflation up, leading to higher interest rates.

Fiscal pressures are also rising as governments increased defence spending, which is expected to drive borrowing higher in European countries such as Germany and the UK.

The yield, or interest rate, on the 30-year US Treasury bond rose to 5.339%, the highest since June 2007. The yield on the 10-year US Treasury bond rose to 4.752%, while the equivalent Japanese government bond yield climbed to 2.955%, the highest in three decades.

The yield on the UK’s 10-year gilts rose to 5.107%. Germany’s 10-year bond yield rose to the highest level since 2011 while France’s equivalent hit a 16-year peak. Bond yields rise when the price of the debt falls.

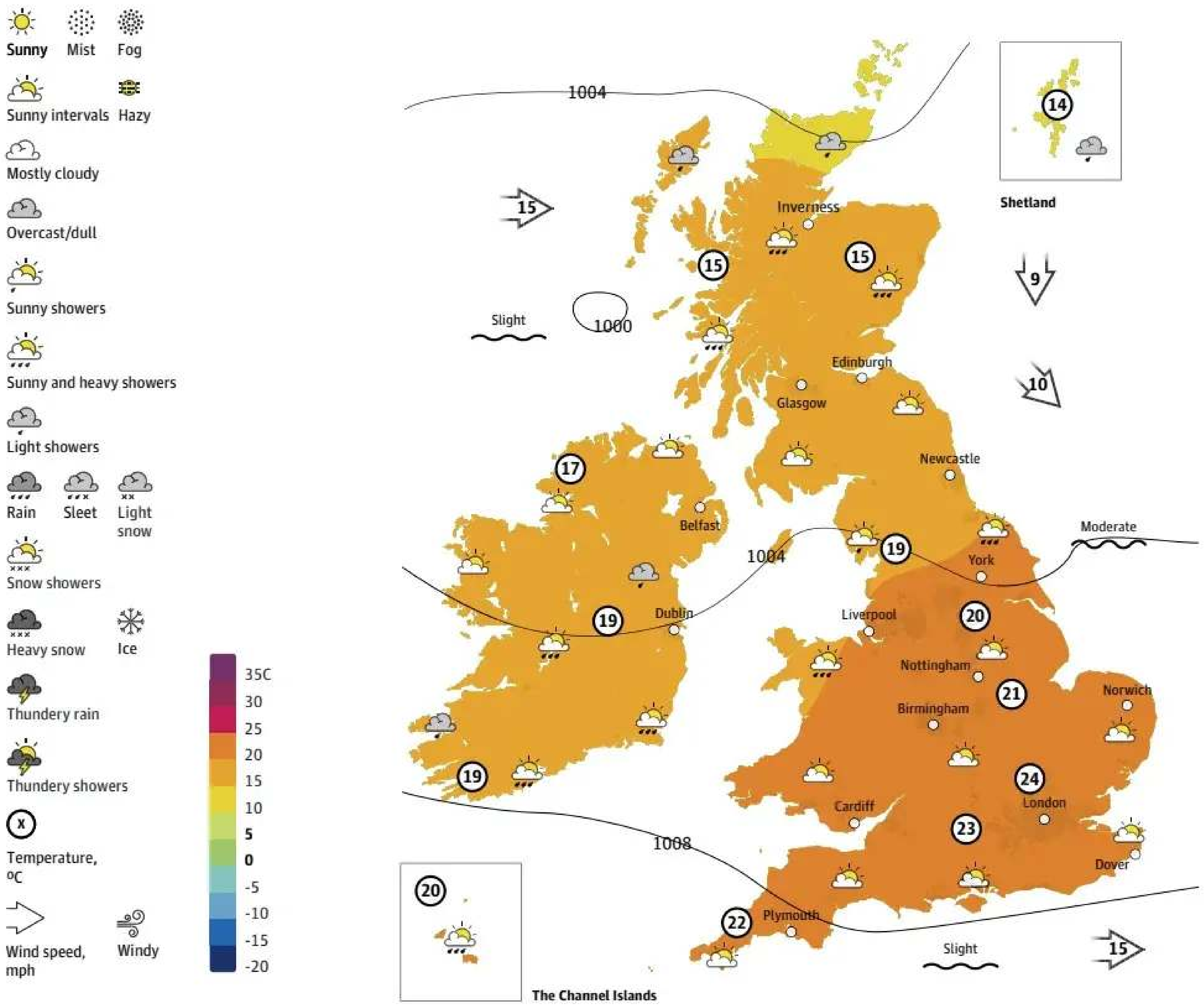
“Rising long-dated bond yields are not driven solely by expectations of higher interest rates and inflation fears. They can also reflect concerns around high levels of government borrowing and investors demanding greater compensation for the risks of holding long-dated government bonds,” said Dan Coatsworth, the head of markets at AJ Bell.

Concerns about the level of new debt hitting the bond markets, issued by governments and companies such as AI firms, is another factor pushing up yields.

Neil Wilson, a Saxo UK investor strategist, said: “We are seeing bond yields across developed markets strike multi-year highs as fixed income investors grow nervous about a range of factors, from inflation and the Iran conflict to deeper structural concerns and fiscal worries.”

Weather
Wednesday 19 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today


Sunny
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Plymouth
Slight
15
The Channel Islands

Forecast

Low 12 High 17
Tomorrow

Low 9 High 18
Friday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

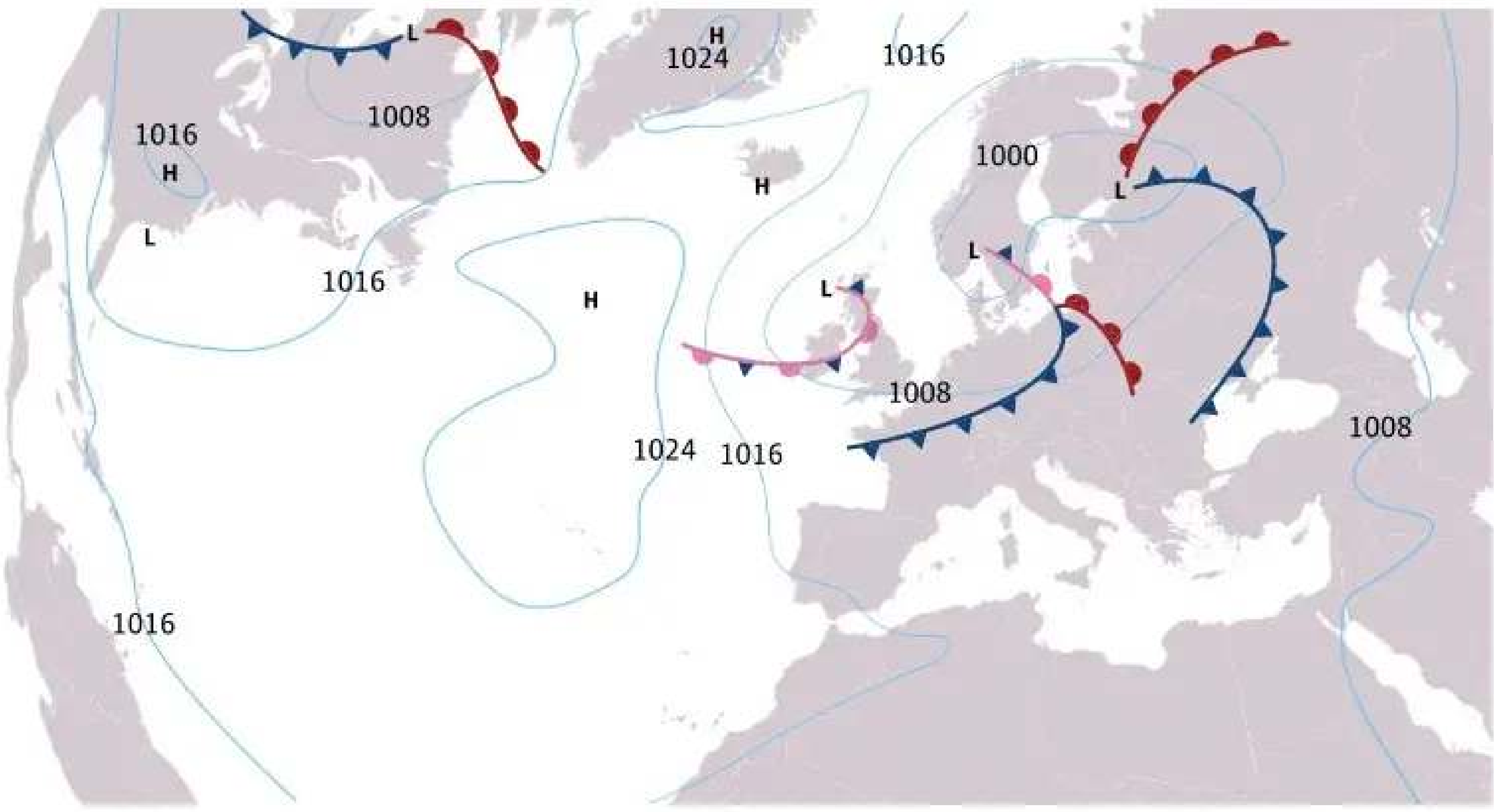
Latest	
14 Aug 2026	427.80
Weekly average	
09 Aug 2026	427.59
18 Aug 2025	425.53
18 Aug 2016	403.08
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs		Precipitation	Air pollution
London	14	24	60%	Low
Manchester	12	20	60%	Low
Edinburgh	10	17	90%	Low
Belfast	11	16	90%	Low
Birmingham	12	22	60%	Low
Brighton	13	21	60%	Low
Bristol	14	21	65%	Low
Cardiff	13	21	60%	Low
Newcastle	10	18	55%	Low
Penzance	15	20	65%	Low

Atlantic front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1008
1024
1016
1008
1016
Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough

High tides

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Aberdeen	0523	3.8m	1754	3.5m
Avonmouth	1101	11.3m	2314	11.0m
Barrow	0314	8.2m	1536	7.8m
Belfast	0312	3.4m	1542	3.1m
Cobh	0928	3.6m	2148	3.5m
Cromer	1025	4.6m	2303	4.2m
Dover	0303	6.0m	1520	6.1m
Dublin	0332	3.7m	1600	3.4m
Galway	0921	4.3m	2142	4.1m
Greenock	0410	3.4m	1648	3.1m
Harwich	0340	3.6m	1551	3.7m
Holyhead	0210	5.0m	1434	4.7m
Hull	1008	6.8m	2232	6.3m
Leith	0649	4.9m	1910	4.6m
Liverpool	0252	8.4m	1515	8.1m
London Bridge	0551	6.4m	1805	6.5m
Lossiemouth	0341	3.6m	1609	3.3m
Milford Haven	1011	5.9m	2229	5.8m
Newquay	0906	5.8m	2124	5.6m
North Shields	0728	4.6m	1958	4.2m
Oban	0925	3.2m	2135	3.2m
Penzance	0838	4.7m	2055	4.6m
Plymouth	0935	4.8m	2141	4.7m
Portsmouth	0332	4.2m	1555	4.3m
Southport	0219	8.1m	1435	7.8m
Stornoway	1103	3.8m	2315	3.7m
Portland	1024	1.6m	2237	1.6m
Whitby	0800	5.0m	2029	4.7m
Wick	0312	3.1m	1538	2.8m
Workington	0318	7.4m	1544	7.0m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0552
Sun sets	2014
Moon rises	1422
Moon sets	2212
First Quarter	20 Aug

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2048 to 0610
Birm'ham	2024 to 0558
Brighton	2013 to 0556
Bristol	2025 to 0605
Carlisle	2035 to 0555
Cork	2049 to 0626
Dublin	2045 to 0613
Glasgow	2045 to 0559
Harlech	2035 to 0606
Inverness	2049 to 0552
London	2014 to 0553
M'chester	2029 to 0558
Newcastle	2031 to 0551
Norwich	2012 to 0545
Penzance	2033 to 0619

Plantwatch

Wildflowers are having a rough time in the countryside, mostly due to intensive farming and less grazing. There are also building developments, competition from invasive plant species and the climate crisis to contend with.

The UK has lost 97% of its wildflower meadows over the last century and over half of the country's native flowers have been in decline for 70 years.

But there is a surprising refuge for wild plants - in urban areas. Cities are often stressful environments, but that can help wildflowers by keeping down competition from plants such as grasses. Wildflowers generally grow best in low-fertility soils which allows them to become established.

Cities also have a wonderful variety of specialised habitats and microclimates in nooks and crannies. Gaps in pavements and walls, roadsides, roundabouts, disused railways, the banks of rivers and the soil under urban trees can all be safe plant havens.

Even the most derelict sites left untouched by humans can be plant refuges, but some of the best environments are where councils don't use herbicides and restrict mowing to encourage wild plants to become established. **Paul Simons**

Around the world

Algiers	34	Lisbon	27
Ams'dam	21	Madrid	36
Athens	32	Malaga	33
Auckland	13	Melb'rne	16
B Aires	13	Mexico C	26
Bangkok	33	Miami	36
Barcelona	32	Milan	34
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Beijing	31	Moscow	18
Berlin	18	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	35
Brussels	20	Nairobi	23
Budapest	29	New Delhi	33
C'hagen	18	New York	30
Cairo	34	Oslo	18
Cape Town	18	Paris	25
Chicago	26	Perth	19
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Dakar	32	Reykjavik	11
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Dublin	18	Rome	32
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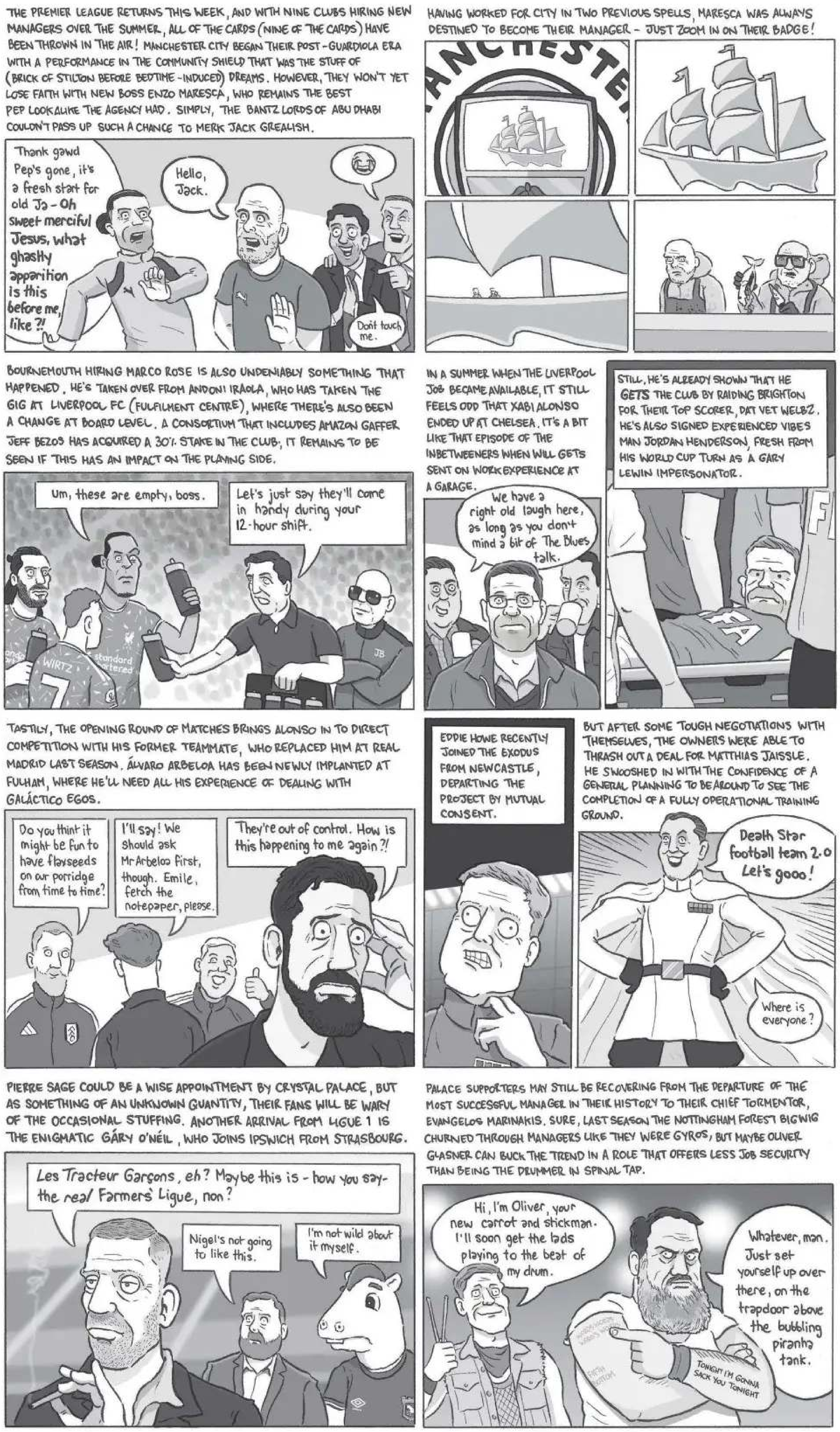
Gibraltar	30	Singapore	31
H Kong	33	Stockh'm	18
Harare	24	Strasb'g	31
Helsinki	20	Sydney	20
Istanbul	30	Tel Aviv	31
Jo'burg	24	Tenerife	29
K Lumpur	32	Tokyo	31
K'mandu	28	Toronto	25
Kabul	34	Vancouv'r	22
Kingston	33	Vienna	28
Kolkata	32	Warsaw	21
L Angeles	33	Wash'ton	32
Lagos	29	Well'ton	11
Lima	23	Zurich	31

Football
Former Watford manager on verge of a world record
Page 38 →

Tennis
Williams sisters defeated on 'fun' return to doubles
Page 36 →

Sport

David Squires on … new managers causing a stir


THE PREMIER LEAGUE RETURNS THIS WEEK, AND WITH NINE CLUBS HIRING NEW MANAGERS OVER THE SUMMER, ALL OF THE CARDS (NINE OF THE CARDS) HAVE BEEN THROWN IN THE AIR! MANCHESTER CITY BEGAN THEIR POST-GUARDIOLA ERA WITH A PERFORMANCE IN THE COMMUNITY SHIELD THAT WAS THE STUFF OF (BRICK OF STILTON BEFORE BEDTIME-INDUCED) DREAMS. HOWEVER, THEY WON'T YET LOSE FAITH WITH NEW BOSS ENZO MARESCA, WHO REMAINS THE BEST PEP LOOKALIKE THE AGENCY HAD. SIMPLY, THE BANTZ LORDS OF ABU DHABI COULDN'T PASS UP SUCH A CHANCE TO MERK JACK GREALISH.
Thank gawd Pep's gone, it's a fresh start for old Ja - Oh sweet merciful Jesus, what ghastly apparition is this before me, like?!
Hello, Jack.
Don't touch me.
HAVING WORKED FOR CITY IN TWO PREVIOUS SPELLS, MARESCA WAS ALWAYS DESTINED TO BECOME THEIR MANAGER - JUST ZOOM IN ON THEIR BADGE!
ANCHESTE
BOURNEMOUTH HIRING MARCO ROSE IS ALSO UNDENIABLY SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED. HE'S TAKEN OVER FROM ANDONI IRAOLA, WHO HAS TAKEN THE GIG AT LIVERPOOL FC (FULFILMENT CENTRE), WHERE THERE'S ALSO BEEN A CHANGE AT BOARD LEVEL. A CONSORTIUM THAT INCLUDES AMAZON GAFFER JEFF BEZOS HAS ACQUIRED A 30% STAKE IN THE CLUB; IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THIS HAS AN IMPACT ON THE PLAYING SIDE.
Um, these are empty, boss.
Let's just say they'll come in handy during your 12-hour shift.
WIRTZ
7
JB
IN A SUMMER WHEN THE LIVERPOOL JOB BECAME AVAILABLE, IT STILL FEELS ODD THAT XABI ALONSO ENDED UP AT CHELSEA. IT'S A BIT LIKE THAT EPISODE OF THE INBETWEENERS WHEN WILL GETS SENT ON WORK EXPERIENCE AT A GARAGE.
We have a right old laugh here, as long as you don't mind a bit of The Blues talk.
STILL, HE'S ALREADY SHOWN THAT HE GETS THE CLUB BY RAIDING BRIGHTON FOR THEIR TOP SCORER, DAT VET WELBZ. HE'S ALSO SIGNED EXPERIENCED VIBES MAN JORDAN HENDERSON, FRESH FROM HIS WORLD CUP TURN AS A GARY LEWIN IMPERSONATOR.
FA
TASTILY, THE OPENING ROUND OF MATCHES BRINGS ALONSO IN TO DIRECT COMPETITION WITH HIS FORMER TEAMMATE, WHO REPLACED HIM AT REAL MADRID LAST SEASON. ÁLVARO ARBELOA HAS BEEN NEWLY IMPLANTED AT FULHAM, WHERE HE'LL NEED ALL HIS EXPERIENCE OF DEALING WITH GALÁCTICO EGOS.
Do you think it might be fun to have flaxseeds on our porridge from time to time?
I'll say! We should ask Mr Arbeloa first, though. Emile, fetch the notepaper, please.
They're out of control. How is this happening to me again?!
EDDIE HOWE RECENTLY JOINED THE EXODUS FROM NEWCASTLE, DEPARTING THE PROJECT BY MUTUAL CONSENT.
BUT AFTER SOME TOUGH NEGOTIATIONS WITH THEMSELVES, THE OWNERS WERE ABLE TO THRASH OUT A DEAL FOR MATTHIAS JAISSLE. HE SWOOSHED IN WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF A GENERAL PLANNING TO BE AROUND TO SEE THE COMPLETION OF A FULLY OPERATIONAL TRAINING GROUND.
Death Star football team 2.0 Let's gooo!
Where is everyone?
PIERRE SAGE COULD BE A WISE APPOINTMENT BY CRYSTAL PALACE, BUT AS SOMETHING OF AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY, THEIR FANS WILL BE WARY OF THE OCCASIONAL STUFFING. ANOTHER ARRIVAL FROM LIGUE 1 IS THE ENIGMATIC GÁRY O'NÉIL, WHO JOINS IPSWICH FROM STRASBOURG.
Les Tracteur Garçons, eh? Maybe this is - how you say - the real Farmers' Ligue, non?
Nigel's not going to like this.
I'm not wild about it myself.
PALACE SUPPORTERS MAY STILL BE RECOVERING FROM THE DEPARTURE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MANAGER IN THEIR HISTORY TO THEIR CHIEF TORMENTOR, EVANGELOS MARINAKIS. SURE, LAST SEASON THE NOTTINGHAM FOREST BIGWIG CHURNED THROUGH MANAGERS LIKE THEY WERE GYROS, BUT MAYBE OLIVER GLASNER CAN BUCK THE TREND IN A ROLE THAT OFFERS LESS JOB SECURITY THAN BEING THE DRUMMER IN SPINAL TAP.
Hi, I'm Oliver, your new carrot and stickman. I'll soon get the lads playing to the beat of my drum.
Whatever, man. Just set yourself up over there, on the trapdoor above the bubbling piranha tank.
TONIGHT I'M GONNA SACK YOU TONIGHT

David Squires archive **Peruse our resident cartoonist's previous work at** *theguardian.com/profile/david-squires*

Racing

Constitution River has chance to fill void

Three-year-old takes on Ombudsman in a tantalising renewal even if Bow Echo's absence will be felt at York

Greg Wood

There is a Bow Echo-shaped hole in the remainder of the 2026 Flat season, after George Boughey's unbeaten colt was retired to stud after a training setback. But a void can also be a vacancy and Constitution River, the second-best three-year-old so far this year, will have an opportunity to step into the breach when he lines up against Ombudsman in what promises to be a memorable renewal of the International Stakes on the opening afternoon of York's Ebor festival today.

Like Bow Echo, Constitution River is unbeaten in three starts this year, and also carried his win-streak into his first all-aged Group One when he powered three lengths clear in the Eclipse Stakes at Sandown in July. After a narrow win from a horrible draw in the Prix du Jockey Club in June, it was enough to push his mark in the global rankings to 124, 7lb behind Ombudsman before they meet for the first time this week.

Today's feature is not a two-horse race by any means, with Andrew Balding's Item, a decisive winner of the Dante Stakes in May over the same track and trip, also in the nine-strong field. A ninth-place finish when second favourite for the Derby, run on soft ground and over a very different track, remains the only blip on his record.

Ombudsman is a shade of odds-on with most bookmakers to follow up his win in a distinctly odd running of the same race last year, when Birr Castle, his pacemaker, raced into a huge lead by the turn for home and was reeled in only inside the final furlong.

Ombudsman will go into it as the world's highest-rated middle-distance horse, but Constitution River has looked like something out of the ordinary since his seven-length defeat of a subsequent Royal Ascot winner in the Dee Stakes at Chester, and a price around 7-4 may significantly underestimate his chance.

Constitution River flowed to victory in July's Eclipse Stakes

Brilliant contests on paper do not always turn out that way on grass but the track, trip and timing of the International Stakes has produced a series of outstanding renewals down the years, including two in the past six seasons alone that picked up the end-of-season accolade of global Race of the Year. Today's race offers a realistic chance to improve the record to three out of seven.

The International is now only the first of four Group Ones spread out over the Ebor festival, alongside the Yorkshire Oaks, the Nunthorpe Stakes and the City of York Stakes on Saturday, which was promoted to the top rung. It is a testament to the near 200-year history and pulling power of the Ebor Handicap, however, that it remains the feature event of the final afternoon and the four-day festival as a whole. It is, quite simply, one of the finest and most popular betting races of the year under either code.

The quality in recent renewals has been remarkable, with winners including the recently retired Trawlerman, who went on to take the Ascot Gold Cup three years later, and, 12 months ago, Willie Mullins's Ethical Diamond, who stormed home in the Breeders' Cup Turf in California later in the season.

The summer has been a series of highlights, from Royal Ascot in June to Goodwood three weeks ago, when what turned out to be Bow Echo's final race in the Sussex Stakes produced the most thrilling finish of the Flat season so far. And such is the depth of quality on the Knavesmire this week that there could be a moment to match it on any of the four days in Yorkshire.

Greg Wood's tips

York **1.50** Toca Madera (nb) **2.25** Trean **3.00** Maltese Cross **3.35** Constitution River **4.10** Kirchner **4.45** Zain Primus **5.20** Henley On Thames (nap)

Carlisle **2.05** Guadalevin **2.38** Aleatrix **3.13** Reenie's Dream **3.48** Hey Havana **4.20** Golden Strike **4.55** Yellow Diamonds **5.30** Ephron

Worcester **5.02** Muskerry Rock **5.33** Mr McWhinny **6.03** Sparkling Water **6.38** Road To Wembley **7.08** Mrs Biddle **7.38** Onehundredneighty **8.08** Redbridge Rambler

Kempton **5.25** Withtearsinmyeyes **5.58** Kochella **6.30** Thunder Home **7.00** Feelin' Free **7.30** Percy's Lad **8.00** Exposure **8.30** Cavolo Nero **9.00** Santiago Boy

Cycling *Tour of Britain Women*

Tour begins under a cloud but women's racing is still on the rise

Jeremy Whittle

The 2026 Tour of Britain Women starts in Cumbria today under a cloud after the death of the Welsh rider Finlay Tarling in the Volta a Portugal last Friday.

Tarling was in a collision with a non-race vehicle during the race's eighth stage and, while police investigations into the exact circumstances surrounding the incident continue, the professional cycling community remains in shock.

Tarling's death has overshadowed the European racing scene and, 10 days after the Tour de France Femmes finished in Nice, the women's peloton returns to the road, tributes will be paid to the 19-year-old, who was one of the brightest young stars on the British scene.

Less than a year before the Tour de France Femmes stages its 2027 Grand Départ in the UK, large crowds are expected on the roadside to watch racing from a peloton that has greater strength in depth than ever before.

Like the Tour de France Femmes, Britain's only World Tour race is going from strength to strength, increasing in duration from four days to five and further boosting the status of women's professional racing to unprecedented heights.

Although neither Kasia Niewiadoma, runner-up to Demi Vollering in the Tour de France Femmes, nor the Dutch double Tour winner are competing, the starting lineup is of high quality.

Several luminaries from the French race will feature, including stage winners Kim Le Court and Lorena Wiebes, and the former world road race champion Lotte Kopecky.

Le Court, who won stage six of the Femmes and finished ninth overall in Nice, crashed out of last year's Tour of Britain after winning the opening stage.

"I'm looking forward to racing the Tour of Britain Women again," she said. "Last year was a mix of emotions for me personally, so I'm looking forward to coming back and making this edition a good one from start to finish."

The defending champion Ally Wollaston, who held off the challenge of Yorkshire's Cat Ferguson in last year's race and won a silver medal in the team pursuit at the Commonwealth Games, will be on the start line in Cockermouth. The five-day race takes the peloton through Cumbria, the north-west, Wales and the Borders, prior to a final stage next Sunday in Royal Leamington Spa.

The route combines rolling roads with flatter stages and some long climbs, particularly in Wales, characteristics that will suit Le Court and Kopecky well.

Wednesday's opening stage is based on a long loop through Cumbria, out from and back to Cockermouth, with narrow lanes and plenty of scope for attacking racing, before a likely sprint finish in Blackpool.

Wiebes, winner of two stages in the Tour de France Femmes and also of the points classification in the nine-day race, will be the favourite to add to her tally of wins in Blackpool. But she also has the punch to compete in the race's hillier stages in Wales.

Kopecky, winner of the Tour of Britain in 2024, is a past stage winner in Llandudno and may again use the Welsh seaside resort as the platform for her challenge. The Belgian's epic but fruitless lone pursuit of Sigrid Haugset in stage three of the Tour Femmes was one of the highlights of the race.

While Ferguson, last year's runner-up, is still recovering from an ankle fracture, Zoe Backstedt, from Pontyclun, who played a key role in supporting Niewiadoma's challenge in the Tour de France Femmes, may be active in the Tour's Welsh stages.

The British national road and time trial champion has already won on the World Tour this year, taking the third stage of the Tour of Switzerland and went on to finish 50th overall and 10th in the youth classification in her first Tour de France Femmes.

After the finish of the hilly fourth stage, in Hay-on-Wye, the race moves to its finale, based around Royal Leamington Spa, next Sunday. With audiences for women's racing rapidly growing, TV coverage has become a hotly debated issue and free-to-air highlights packages will be available on ITV with live coverage on YouTube.

▲ *Lotte Kopecky, a former Tour of Britain winner, is part of a strong lineup*
TIM DE WAELE/GETTY IMAGES

▼ *Serena and Venus dazzled briefly before subsiding in a tie-break*
SHAINA BENHIYOUN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Tennis

Fans revel in Williams sister act despite defeat

Fourteen-time grand slam champion pair beaten on first doubles outing since 2022

Tumaini Carayol
Lindner Family Tennis Center

One game into the family reunion of the decade, Venus Williams launched herself inside the baseline in her single-minded pursuit of a puffball second serve. For a brief moment the Cincinnati Open was transported back 15 years. Williams pounded her forehand return directly at the right hip of her opponent Marta Kostyuk, instantly eliciting gasps from the audience as she snatched the point. Back when the Williams sisters spent their spare time racking up grand slam titles for fun, this was how they dealt with most adversaries.

In the end, Venus and Serena's first doubles match together in four years, and only their second in the past decade, ended in a 6-2, 1-6, 10-8 defeat to Kostyuk and Peyton Stearns, another wildcard pair and two formidable singles players. For once, the result did not seem to matter.

"Winning is obviously great," said Serena. "But I think in this position, [we're] just having fun. I didn't come out here to win this tournament. Obviously, I wanted to do the best I could do, but I think having fun and also just seeing how we are and how we feel out there. Being out there with the fans, too, is just really good, just to give them another opportunity to see us play, which is really cool."

Even before she made the familiar trip to Mason, Ohio, Serena's presence had been felt this year. For two days during the first round, a plane circled above the tournament grounds carrying an advertisement banner featuring Serena endorsing Ro, a telehealth company that provides patients with access to GLP-1 weight-loss drugs.

This match also underlined how dysfunctional tennis can be. Despite the massive anticipation surrounding the return of the Williams sisters – almost certainly the last time this audience will get to see them – the rigid nature of television contracts meant the match was relegated to Grandstand Court, the tournament's 5,000-seat second stadium. Every seat was taken, with fans streaming out of the entrances and crowding the staircase from the adjoining Center Court, which holds 11,600, to catch a glimpse of two American greats.

For all the goodwill, excitement and anticipation at the simple joy of seeing them together again, early on the spectacle itself was rough. After Venus held in the opening game, they conceded five consecutive games to trail 1-5. Serena's lack of matchplay was the obvious issue, with the younger sister struggling for timing on her groundstrokes or rhythm on her usually immaculate serve.

As Serena's rust gradually fell away, Venus was largely solid, pairing crisp shotmaking with elite reflex volleys. By the start of set two, everything was flowing. They rolled through the set and into a match tie-break. Down 2-8, they nearly pulled off an outlandish comeback before a double fault from Venus at 8-9 ended their hopes.

Serena had not competed since her return to singles competition at Wimbledon last month, where she sustained a knee injury in her three-set loss to Maya Joint, forcing her to withdraw from her planned doubles match with Venus. "That was a little traumatic experience for me," Serena said, smiling. "It took me two hours to leave the locker room that night and it's been a long recovery, which is something I never thought I'd say because I never thought I'd be here sitting and talking to you all again. But, you know, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

In her Instagram post after the loss, which included photos of vials she had used to collect the fluid from her knee, Serena said her followers would see her soon on a court near them, and here she made good on that. The US Open will follow for both sisters, but it is unclear whether they will take to the court in singles or doubles. "I've never really enjoyed the process, but I think this time I'm enjoying the process a little bit more," said Serena. "It's kind of just having a different view of it. And it's also like this isn't for ever. This is like not long. So it's also just fun to know that too. I'm not showing up every week and have kids. So it's a little bit different."

Serena's comeback, which has mainly been confined to doubles so far, has served as a reminder of the greatness of the sisters' doubles careers, achievements that are usually hidden behind their all-time great singles results. This is also one of the greatest doubles teams in history. They have won 14 grand slam titles together, which places them joint-second in the open era among women's doubles teams, behind Martina Navratilova and Pam Shriver. They also reached world No 1 and won three Olympic gold medals.

Their partnership began in the 1990s, yet still it endures. "We waited a long time to get back on the doubles court, even this year," said Venus. "I think eventually we would find our way to each other."

> ***'Winning is great but I didn't come out here to win this tournament. I wanted to do the best I could'***
>
> **Serena Williams**

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The Guardian

▲ *Amid Dedic played previously under Matthias Jaissle at RB Salzburg*

Dedic decides on Newcastle as Villa snap up Wan-Bissaka

Louise Taylor, Ed Aarons and agencies

The chance to be reunited with Matthias Jaissle convinced Amar Dedic to swap Benfica for Newcastle in a £29.5m transfer. Dedic becomes Newcastle's sixth signing of a turbulent summer on Tyneside and the 24-year-old Bosnia and Herzegovina international is likely to start at right-back at home to Liverpool on Sunday.

"Working with Matthias again was a big factor for me," said Dedic, who played for Newcastle's new manager at RB Salzburg. "We know each other well; he knows what I can bring to the pitch and I'm really happy to play for him again. It's a special feeling and a real honour to join Newcastle."

With Tino Livramento still recovering from a calf injury, Newcastle's lack of senior right-backs has been highlighted in pre-season and, soon after replacing Eddie Howe, Jaissle advised executives that Dedic could fill the void.

Aston Villa have agreed a deal with West Ham to sign Aaron Wan-Bissaka on loan with an option to make his move permanent at the end of the season. Villa had an initial offer to take Wan-Bissaka on a straight loan rejected by West Ham. The DR Congo defender will provide Unai Emery with cover for Matty Cash. Villa are also hoping to sign João Palhinha and remain in talks with Bayern Munich over the Portugal midfielder.

Juventus confirmed they have signed Guglielmo Vicario from **Tottenham** on a season-long loan. The deal includes an option for Juve to make the goalkeeper's move permanent at the end of the season. Vicario, 29, joined Spurs from Empoli in 2023 and has made 117 appearances for the north London club. He was part of the side that won the Europa League in 2025 but lost his place to Antonin Kinsky after the arrival of Roberto De Zerbi as manager in March.

Sunderland were set to announce their acquisition of a new left-back after fending off competition from Roma and Newcastle to sign the Toulouse defender Dayann Methalie for £25.6m, but that transfer was on hold last night after it emerged that the 20-year-old had failed part of his medical. Sunderland's specialists are believed to have detected a potential back problem and the defender has now returned to Toulouse.

Xisco leads Malaysia's invincibles to verge of history

Former Watford manager has helped Johor Darul Ta'zim to 108 league games unbeaten - one match from a world record

Sam Cunningham
Johor

▼ *Xisco Muñoz and the Brazilian striker Bérgson react to another JDT win*
ASHOK KUMAR/GETTY IMAGES

Many Watford fans felt Xisco Muñoz was dismissed too soon after leading them into the Premier League as Championship runners-up in 2021, only to be ousted less than two months into the new season. He is remembered fondly at Vicarage Road, an emblem of the churn-and-burn of the Gino Pozzo era.

But unless you continued to follow the Spaniard's career closely, you would struggle to guess where he manages now. The life of a football manager is varied and unpredictable, but how has the former Watford head coach ended up in charge of a club 6,500 miles away and on the verge of an extraordinary world record?

Not one averse to adventure - since moving into coaching Xisco has taken jobs in Georgia, Cyprus and Slovakia - the former Valencia and Betis midfielder agreed last summer to take over at the Malaysian Super League side Johor Darul Ta'zim, based just across the border from Singapore.

A remarkable amount of pressure rests on their opening game of the Malaysian Super League season against Kuching on Friday. Avoid defeat and they will set the world record for unbeaten league matches, 109, surpassing the benchmark set by the Ivorian side Asec Mimosas that has stood for 32 years.

Xisco likes the idea that, in a world dominated by the financial clout of European clubs, this is a record none of the household names are ever likely to surpass.

But he stresses that while JDT are backed by the resources of the Malaysian royal family - ever since His Royal Highness Major General Tunku Ismail ibni Sultan Ibrahim, known more aptly as the Crown Prince, bought the club in 2013 and turned them into a sort of Manchester City of Malaysia - it is by no means easy.

"It's difficult to not lose one game," Xisco says from his office in their 40,000-seater Sultan Ibrahim Stadium. "Something might happen - one day someone is sleeping, or after 10 minutes the whole team is sleeping, or maybe you don't 100% concentrate in the first minutes and you concede two goals and it's difficult to change the game."

He credits "the work of the boss in the last 13 years" for putting them in this position. Their 108-game unbeaten streak started in April 2021. "Now it's only one game. The line is very close between success or frustration. This is important. We are so close to making history for unbeaten games in a row. This isn't normal in football."

When Xisco was first approached by the Crown Prince, he was sold on "the project" - not only winning trophies in Malaysia but raising the standards of the country's football and its standing on the global stage. There has been a deliberate effort to follow the European model. JDT's chief executive is Luis García, the former Champions League winner with Liverpool. The academy director, Javier Ribera, arrived from Valencia. Xisco says JDT's facilities are comparable to those in the Premier League.

In Europe finances have created a rigidity that is hard to break, with the best players ending up at a handful of clubs. By contrast Xisco believes Asian football is filled with growth potential. He points to the dominance of Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, Paris Saint-Germain in France, a clutch of clubs in England. "Every day it's more difficult to find good players. It's totally different here. Asia is a place for the future. Europe has problems with their economies. They are in one place and it's difficult to progress."

Xisco finds it refreshing to work for an owner who demands the highest standards and supports them financially. If he or his staff need something - a new piece of gym or medical equipment, anything they believe could raise their level - the Crown Prince provides it. "Sometimes you are in some jobs, every time trying to cut some things because you have problems. Here, no. Always try to give the best to reach a high level," Xisco says.

Xisco during his time in charge at Watford in 2021

The Crown Prince is relentlessly ambitious, signs off on everything and even attends many training sessions, arriving with scores of security staff, either in supercars or lengthy motorcades.

"I like everything about him. It's true. I don't know how long I will be here. I never know, because football is about results. But right now I'm happy. I feel well with him. He's a positive voice. He pushes us. He helps me a lot."

JDT have completed Malaysian football - winning 12 consecutive titles - but the next frontier is the Asian Champions League. Last season, they reached the quarter-finals, the furthest so far by a Malaysian club, losing to the Saudi giants Al-Ahli, whose team included Ivan Toney and Riyad Mahrez. The competition represents another significant cultural shift from Europe. To play the Japanese J1 League side Machida Zelvia away is a 6,000-mile round trip.

"In England, you have one hour 30 minutes by plane to get back. Here maybe you need 10 hours or 12 hours if you go to Japan in the Champions League. You need to manage a lot of situations that are totally different. The culture is totally different between Europe and Asia."

'We are so close to making history for unbeaten games in a row. This isn't normal in football'

Their domestic dominance can also become a hindrance when a team so used to attacking is forced to defend and players struggle to adapt to new tactical requirements. To counter this, Xisco organises competitive XI v XI training matches, utilising JDT's vast 40-player squad - a necessity given how many competitions they play - to work on deficiencies.

It helps having Arif Aiman - a 24-year-old known in these parts as the "Asian Messi" who scored in the recent friendly against Chelsea, which ended 3-3. He reminds Xisco of João Pedro, whom he coached at Watford.

Xisco loves his unpredictability and invention, how you can't take your eyes off him because you might miss him completely change the game. "In modern football, sometimes we don't have this type of class."

He adds: "He was one of my big surprises. Sometimes you have a young player, like João Pedro at Watford, in 10 minutes you say, wow, this player is different. Arif is the same. Arif has the same capacity - the capacity to change the game."

Analysis

Sam Cunningham

Who will Clearlake have left to blame if Boehly leaves Chelsea?

Perhaps, in hindsight, it was always going to end this way. As some of the world's wealthiest investors scrambled to find funds after Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine set a series of dominoes toppling that forced Roman Abramovich to sell Chelsea, it threw together some unexpected allies.

Todd Boehly became the public face of the winning bid, convincing the US sports mogul Mark Walter and the Swiss businessman Hansjörg Wyss to join as 12.8% minority investors. The private equity firm Clearlake Capital put in 61.6%, bringing the owners Behdad Eghbali and José E Feliciano, who made their fortunes investing in tech, into the leadership fold.

But once the adrenaline rush of beating 11 serious rivals in an expedited bid process run by the Raine Group had worn off, the problems started. Now they actually owned Chelsea, how were they going to run it? What was the strategy?

Maybe Abramovich made running Chelsea look easier than it was. The club had not finished outside the top five for six seasons, yet in the four seasons since the takeover, their average league position is eighth – with a high of fourth and a low of 12th. Possibly the conflicting opinions of people who always think they are right, and have the money to prove it, is not the optimal setup.

Before the takeover, an agreement was struck that Boehly, representing Walter and Wyss, would have final signoff on major decisions alongside Eghbali and Feliciano. Over the years, Boehly and Eghbali have been the dominant day-to-day decision-makers at the club, while the others remained largely silent partners, insulated from the fan anger and social media ridicule that inevitably follows any period of struggle.

Some sources maintain that Boehly and Eghbali share a "professional" relationship, but signs of strain had leaked into the public domain long before this week's revelation that Boehly and Walter were open to selling their stakes to Clearlake in a deal that would value the club at about £5bn.

In May 2024 Boehly told the Qatar Economic Forum that "patience" with the project was essential. Mauricio Pochettino had just led Chelsea to the EFL Cup final, the FA Cup semi-final and they had recovered from a poor start to finish sixth. Cole Palmer was a breakout star; Reece James was made captain. They won their last five games of the season. Six days later, Pochettino was gone – dismissed after the co-sporting directors Paul Winstanley and Laurence Stewart compiled an 18-page review of the season.

Another glimpse of the pervading tension – and possibly a hint at what was to come – emerged in March last year in Boehly's Bloomberg interview discussing stadium development plans, four years after they were announced.

"We have to think long term about what we're trying to accomplish," Boehly said. "We have a big stadium development opportunity that we have to flesh out. That's going to be where we're either aligned or we ultimately decide to go different ways."

Publicly, Boehly insisted the ownership was aligned. Yet that is also at odds with how it began: the American installing himself as sporting director and driving a £250m spending spree targeting experienced players such as Raheem Sterling and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang. Chelsea finished 12th.

Boehly then stepped back, with Eghbali taking a more active role. About 70 interviews took place to build a new football structure, resulting in the appointments of Winstanley and Stewart – later promoted to co-sporting directors – and Joe Shields, now a co-director of recruitment.

They attempted to redefine how a football club is run: buying young, handing out unusually long contracts, in a model that has fascinated and baffled many. As an indication of how well that's gone, in 2024 fans placed stickers around Stamford Bridge mocking up the three owners as clowns, while the supporters' trust described their club as "a laughing stock".

The spending has been unprecedented – the pre-tax loss of £262.4m in the year ending June 2025 was a Premier League record supporters had probably not envisaged after Boehly declared the owners' vision was "to make the fans proud" after the takeover. They have complied with Premier League spending restrictions only by effectively selling the women's side to themselves. But it could not stop a significant fine for breaching Uefa's financial rules, which did not permit the club to include the sale as income.

> *Both sides have explored buying each other out, but it appears hands have been forced*

But there have been signs that the grand plan(s) will work. Under Enzo Maresca Chelsea qualified for the Champions League and lifted the Club World Cup, and there was frustration that last season was derailed by his abrupt departure in January, after which they plummeted from Champions League contenders to 10th.

Now comes another reset under Xabi Alonso and a new strategy tweak towards older, more tried and tested players. But the boardroom drama persists. Both sides have explored buying each other out in recent years, but it appears Boehly's and Walter's hands have been forced. Walter, a long-term business partner of Boehly, is under investigation by the US Department of Justice for alleged tax fraud and is believed to be selling assets to pay loans facing federal attention. He unexpectedly sold the Los Angeles Lakers to Josh Kushner and Bob Iger for $12.5bn (£9.2bn) last week and his Chelsea stake could be next.

An exit would coincide neatly with Boehly's five-year tenure as Chelsea chair coming to an end at the conclusion of this season and a representative from Clearlake ready to fill his place. If a sale is agreed, Eghbali and Feliciano will have full control – and no one else to blame if things don't improve.

▲ *Relations between Behdad Eghbali (left) and Todd Boehly are strained*
CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

Senegal turn to Vieira after World Cup woes

Senegal have appointed France's 1998 World Cup winner Patrick Vieira as head coach, the country's football federation announced, succeeding Pape Thiaw, who was dismissed in the wake of their World Cup exit.

The appointment of Vieira, who was born in Senegal, is a "strategic move", the federation said in a social media post, aiming to "establish a high-level technical staff, in line with our country's sporting ambitions".

His main mission will be to revitalise the team after Senegal's bruising loss to Belgium in the last 32 of the World Cup. Thiaw was sacked less than two weeks later. The 45-year-old former Senegal international had taken over in 2024.

The Senegalese football federation (FSF) president said at the time of his dismissal that toxicity had surrounded the team at the World Cup after Thiaw demanded a pay rise.

The Lions of Teranga had also suffered two defeats in the World Cup group stage, against France and Norway, before a 5-0 victory over Iraq secured their place in the knockout rounds.

The appointment of Vieira, who grew up in France from the age of eight, was ratified on Monday, the FSF said. His official presentation would occur at a future, unspecified date, it added. **Agence France-Presse**

Patrick Vieira was born in Senegal and moved to France aged eight

Results

Football

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Playoffs: First leg Dinamo Zagreb L Viking L; Fenerbahce L Lyon L; Levski Sofia L AEK Athens L

NATIONAL LEAGUE CUP

Group A Gateshead L Nottingham Forest U21 L; Halifax L Derby U21 L; Scunthorpe L Stoke U21 L; Wealdstone L Wolves U21 L. **Group B** Aldershot L Fulham U21 L; Braintree L Ipswich U21 L; Hornchurch L Norwich U21 L; Worthing L West Ham U21 L. **Group C** Boreham Wood L Leeds U21 L; Solihull Moors L Middlesbrough U21 L; Tamworth L Newcastle U21 L. **Group D** Boston L Birmingham U21 L; Sutton L Leicester U21 L; Truro L Southampton U21 L; Woking L West Brom U21 L

VERTU EFL TROPHY

Northern: Group B Wigan L Aston Villa U21 L. **Group E** Stockport L Everton U21 L. **Southern: Group C** Reading L Wycombe L. **Group F** Barnet L Arsenal U21 L; Leyton Orient L AFC Wimbledon L. **Group G** Northampton L Brighton U21 L

ENTERPRISE NORTH

Bedford L Buxton L; Brackley L King's Lynn L; Darlington L Chester L; Hebburn L Worksop L; Hednesford L Southport L; Hereford L Radcliffe L; Marine L Chorley L; Merthyr L Telford L; Morecambe L South Shields L; Oxford City L Harborough L; Scarborough L Spennymoor L; Spalding L Macclesfield L

ENTERPRISE SOUTH

Totton L Dorking L; Dover L Tonbridge L; Hemel Hempstead L Maidenhead L; Horsham L Hampton & Richmond L; Maidstone L Folkestone Invicta L; Slough L Farnham L; Torquay L Weston-super-Mare L; Walton & H L Dag & Red L

PARK'S MOTOR GROUP LOWLAND LEAGUE WEST

Caledonian Braves L Clydebank L; Cumnock Juniors L Largs Thistle L; Kilwinning L Albion L

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PD	Pts
Leeds	23	18	0	5	784	346	+438	**36**
Wigan	23	18	0	5	689	407	+282	**36**
Warrington	22	16	0	6	598	360	+238	**32**
Wakefield	23	16	0	7	625	422	+203	**32**
Hull KR	22	15	0	7	660	349	+311	**30**
Leigh	23	15	0	8	508	428	+80	**30**
St Helens	23	13	0	10	548	508	+40	**26**
Catalans Dragons	23	9	0	14	449	691	-242	**18**
Castleford	23	8	0	15	408	716	-308	**16**
Toulouse	23	7	0	16	460	618	-158	**14**
York	23	7	0	16	454	665	-211	**14**
Hull	23	6	0	17	399	499	-100	**12**
Huddersfield	23	6	0	17	401	661	-260	**12**
Bradford	23	6	0	17	392	705	-313	**12**

Hull KR L Warrington L

Cricket

FIRST MEN'S TEST (fourth day of five)

Galle India 462 (D Padikkal 167, KL Rahul 82, DC Jurel 51; NGRP Jayasuriya 4-109) & 193 (RR Pant 66; AM Fernando 4-31). Sri Lanka 284 (GS Dinusha 100, DPDN Dickwella 80; MJ Suthar 4-76) & 84-4. Sri Lanka, with six second-innings wickets remaining, require 288 runs to beat India.

Tennis

ATP & WTA CINCINNATI OPEN (Mason, Ohio, USA)

Men: Singles: Third round: C O'Connell (Aus) w/o J Fonseca (Br); **N Borges** (Por) bt A Rublev (Rus) 6-3 6-4; **L Musetti** (It) bt M Zheng US) 6-1 6-3; **T Fritz** (US) bt D Merida (Sp) 6-3 6-4

Women: Singles: Third round: M Keys (US) bt K Siniakova (Cz) 6-1 6-3

Men: Doubles: First round: M Granollers & H Zeballos (Sp/Arg) bt F Cabral & J Tracy (Por/US) 7-6 (7-4) 6-2; **É Roger-Vasselin & H Nys** (Fr/Mon) bt L Johnson & J Zielinski (GB/Pol) 3-6 6-4 10-3; **H Heliovaara & H Patten** (Fin/GB) bt Y Hanfmann & M Kecmanovic (Ger/Ser) 6-4 6-2; **R Ram & J Salisbury** (US/GB) bt L Glasspool & J Cash (GB/GB) 6-7 (1-7) 6-4 12-10

Women: Doubles: Second round: A Sutjiadi & E Routliffe (Ino/NZ) bt S Aoyama & Liang ES (Jpn/Tai) 6-3 6-2; **Zhang S & Jiang X** (Chn/Chn) bt U Eikeri & Q Gleason (Nor/US) 6-1 6-2

Baseball

MLB

Boston 11 Arizona 1; Chicago Cubs 7 Chicago White Sox 5; Cincinnati 1 St Louis 2; Cincinnati 6 St Louis 5; Colorado 5 LA Dodgers 11; Houston 2 Seattle 3; Kansas 9 Athletics 5; Minnesota 4 Atlanta 2; New York 2 San Diego 1; Philadelphia 6 Miami 5; Pittsburgh 5 Detroit 8; Tampa Bay 7 Baltimore 6

Fixtures

Football

Uefa Champions League

Playoffs: First leg Celtic v Lask (8pm); Hapoel Be'er Sheva v Sabah (8pm); NEC v Bodø/Glimt (8pm); Slovan Bratislava v Celje (8pm)

Vertu EFL Trophy

Northern: Group D Mansfield v Manchester City U21 (7pm)

Enterprise South

Farnborough v Chesham (7.45pm)

Breedon Highland League

Banks O' Dee v Turriff (8pm); Forres Mechanics v Clachnacuddin (8pm); Inverurie Loco Works v Fraserburgh (8pm); Nairn v Lossiemouth (8pm); Rothes v Formartine (8pm); Strathspey v Brora (8pm); Wick Academy v Invergordon (8pm)

Park's Motor Group Scottish Lowland League West

Auchinleck Talbot v Beith Juniors (7.45pm); Pollok v Johnstone Burgh (7.45pm); Troon v Renfrew (7.45pm)

Cricket (10.30am unless stated)

First Men's Test (first day of five)

England v Pakistan, Headingley (11am)

Metro Bank One-Day Cup Women

Essex v Somerset, Chelmsford; Surrey v Hampshire, Guildford; The Blaze v Durham, Trent Bridge; Warwickshire v Yorkshire, Edgbaston

Pep's passion: Amazon's strikingly candid Guardiola series pulls no punches

BORN HERE, SOME DR
GUÉHI
GVARDIOL
KHUSANOV
REIJNDERS
SAVINHO
MANCHESTER
CITY
18
94

▼ *Pep Guardiola tries to rally his players amid Manchester City's struggles*
TOM FLATHERS/AMAZON

From his divorce to rows with players and criticism from above, new documentary tells the story of a difficult period

Jamie Jackson

Having occupied a front-row seat for the final two seasons of Pep Guardiola's gilded Manchester City tenure, the subject of Amazon's A Beautiful Obsession, the surprise to me is how unfiltered the four-part series is.

Particularly, the telling of the torrid 2024-25 campaign when the wheels came clattering off in the bleakest of mid-winter plunges that featured nine defeats and one victory in 13 aura-shattering games.

To be shown from today on Prime, this series controlled and filmed by City is no hagiography of Guardiola or his players that seeks to paper over the great Catalan's most harrowing season. Neither is the decision to let go of the club's greatest modern-day player, Kevin De Bruyne, soft-soaped. And the anger of Khaldoon al-Mubarak, the chair, at Guardiola's odd decision to change 10 players for last season's 2-0 Champions League loss at home to Bayer Leverkusen is not left on the cutting-room floor.

Instead, the viewer witnesses up close and maybe too personal, when his divorce is cited as motivation, a Guardiola flailing for solutions he fails to find. Shown, too, is how the ruthless business of football reduces a peerless manager and De Bruyne to the commodities they are, as City's "machine built for winning" (Khaldoon's description) must thresh on.

Guardiola uses his marriage breaking down after a 2-0 defeat by Juventus in the Champions League on 11 December 2024. It was City's seventh reverse in 10 games, so to try to rouse the team from their slump a disgusted Guardiola unloads about what went wrong between him and Cristina Serra.

"I'm fucking divorced from the most beautiful woman on your planet," he says. "I love her unbelievably, but we lost the passion. How do you play football, because you are paid? Or because of something inside? Where is the passion?"

This is an interesting choice. If Guardiola has every right to talk about personal issues, the decision seems counterproductive: a crossing of the professional/private line that could, conversely, make him appear weaker before his team, as normal managerial modes of motivation have lost their power. As he says later regarding what makes a good No 1: "You have to convince your players [that they would] go to the penthouse, the roof and jump down [for you]."

A year later, after the 10 changes against Leverkusen, Guardiola again says: "I leave my life, my divorce and my family is away, and everything for all of you. And what do you give back?"

Manuel Estiarte, in the second episode named The Rebuild, compounds the sense of a man running out of ideas when Guardiola's close friend, and City's director of first-team operations, reveals he told the players about the divorce, to let them know this is why "Pep is anxious, sad, different".

DE BRUYNE
17

An emotional Pep Guardiola hugs Kevin De Bruyne

Estiarte continues: "I said to the team: 'Please, you have to understand, you're not playing with a coach who can be a bit impulsive, intense, sometimes a bit up and down. You're seeing a human being. He's getting a divorce.' It was necessary for the team not only to visualise Pep as a manager but for the first time as a human being."

First, you wonder why Guardiola did not impart this sensitive information himself to the players, as this might have aided the intended impact. Then, you ponder if Khaldoon and Ferran Soriano, City's CEO, discussed whether the manager's private life might be affecting his ability to do his job.

Interestingly, we cut next to a jovial Guardiola. "In my life I made a lot of changes - I got divorced and I have to settle a bit. But no complaints at all honestly," he says before, tellingly, insisting he is a happy man - regarding his work. "In my job, yeah," the manager says.

The theme of interpersonal relations is a leitmotif of the documentary - and so, by extension, Guardiola's management style (episode three is titled: Love and Hugs).

In "The Desert", part one, he is close to tears after Kyle Walker abandons the teetering ship in January 2025, precisely when City need their captain. Walker did not behave like their leader, Guardiola tells the players, before a cutting rhetorical question: as they had voted him as the captain, why did they not pin him to the wall and demand more loyalty, he asks.

The scene that precipitates the defender's departure is beautifully filmed and comes in the Anfield dressing room after Walker's error leads to Luis Díaz winning a penalty converted by Mohamed Salah in the 2-0 loss.

Guardiola mentions this, causing Walker to fire back that the finger is being pointed at him "every meeting". It ends with the manager in tears, delivering a soliloquy about how his signing of a new contract, only 11 days before, in the midst of the disastrous run, was because of a desire to fight. Juxtaposed in the shot, in a moment of cinematic panache, is Walker, now silently reflecting on his role in this. Guardiola says: "If captains first, then the other ones, for example [feel] that there's a problem, tell me. It's not going to change the love I have for all of you. I'm sorry."

More regrets start episode two, after De Bruyne is not offered a new deal, and Soriano stresses to Khaldoon that "Kevin gets the respect he deserves as the greatest player in the modern history of City". Guardiola reveals 'Super Kev' broke down in his office but also that there had to be coldness in the decision to offload him, before the Belgian is shown crying when asked what will be missed most. "My kids don't want to go," he says.

'I leave my life and my family is away, and everything for all of you. And what do you give back?'

Here, the viewer is reminded how those in elite sport can feel emotion, that tapping into passions is vital for success. And that beyond the game-face displayed on the pitch, and in front of the media and fans, are real relationships which bring joy - and hurt.

More admirable honesty is offered up when Guardiola's 10 changes for that November 2025 defeat to Leverkusen are criticised. "Our attitude with Pep Guardiola should not be too negative. But it shouldn't be too kind or accommodating either. This is his mistake this time," says Soriano. To which Khaldoon says: "To pick an entire new [outfield] team in a game this important is probably one of the lowest points we've had. I can't speak to him - I'm so angry."

Yet, by the end of part four - "Nothing Is Eternal" - all seems comparatively rosy again. The Carabao Cup and FA Cup are claimed to make it 20 trophies (including three Community Shields) in a decade for Guardiola, and City finish second. With his rebuild done he receives a fitting send-off, before the start of the rest of his life. As he says: "Life should not just be about football. It's too much to be honest."

Barcelona glee as Rodri fills hole left by Busquets

The deal is done and Spain's World Cup-winning captain has arrived in Catalonia, to the chagrin of Real Madrid

Sid Lowe

By the time Flight PTN27B started its descent into El Prat a bit before 8pm on Monday evening, a small crowd had gathered by the terminal doors, waiting for it to land. A few people stood and watched the sky, cameras out to capture its arrival. A lot more watched on their phones. In the two hours it had taken to get there from Manchester, taking off at 5.11pm, 101 minutes behind schedule, the Pilatus PC-24 had become the most tracked plane on the planet. Everyone knew that Rodrigo Hernández was on board. Unless, of course, he had been sneaked away in a catering cart.

Five days earlier, Rodri had been seen, and recorded, at Barajas airport waiting to get on a flight back to Manchester from Madrid. He wheeled a small RFEF (Spanish football federation) case with his name on, stood alone in the queue, the World Cup winning-captain just a bloke in shorts, and his stay in the UK was supposed to be brief, just long enough to say goodbye. The plane he was boarding was a Ryanair one: that was the detail everyone homed in on, something extraordinary in the ordinariness. This time, though, he came on a private jet, one way. His family travelled with him. He came to sign for FC Barcelona.

Rodri was late: an agreement between Manchester City and Barcelona had taken a little longer than expected, long enough for concern to creep in, and his flight landed 70 minutes behind schedule. Maybe he is *late*-late, too: at 30, and three years after the departure of Sergio Busquets - the man to whom he had always been likened and whose natural successor he has always been … this transfer could perhaps have come sooner. Yet it was rarely even contemplated, virtually up until the moment it happened. In that sense, it had actually been quick. A fortnight ago, few thought of this.

Now here he was, heading out in jeans and a white T-shirt. There was expectation, a hint still of disbelief that they had got him. A touch of relief, too, after the delay. They had been "intense days" Rodri said, but now it was done. Barcelona's third bid had been accepted: €60m plus a further €15m in add-ons, €11m of which are virtually guaranteed. He will earn around €15m a year, an increase on his salary at City, and has signed a four-year deal.

"I'm happy to be here," Rodri said, and they were happy to have him. The following morning he arrived at the club's Joan Despí training ground to complete his medical, everything signed off. As he left the terminal building, Rodri had been asked if this was a dream come true. He of course said yes it was, which he had to say. The question had been direct, leading. It had been loaded too.

A Ballon d'Or winner and the embodiment of a style, an identity, that is theirs too, Rodri is the perfect fit. The time was right for him too. Voted the best player at the World Cup, the culmination of his recovery from injury, there was just one year left on his contract at City. He had won it all in England and Pep Guardiola had gone. After seven years away, home called. But home didn't mean Barcelona; in fact, it had seemed more likely to mean Real Madrid.

Rodri grew up to the north-west of the capital and even Real's refusal to turn up the night he won the Ballon d'Or, an act of grubbiness and disrespect, didn't mean closing the door. Instead, he was increasingly open about his willingness - his apparent desire - to go. "Obviously, when the best club in history, the most successful with everything that brings, call you it is an honour and you always have to pay attention," he said not long after the ceremony. In the spring, Rodri admitted he would like to return to Spain and that he would not rule out going to Real, even if he had been in the academy at Atlético. When Real held presidential elections in May, the pretender, Enrique Riquelme, announced that his signing would be Rodri. For his part, Rodri kept his counsel and come the end of the World Cup he had three offers: Paris Saint-Germain, who he ruled out because he wanted a return to Spain, Barcelona and Real.

> *'I watched Busquets especially closely; he laid down a model of playing I knew I had to follow'*

Real, ambivalent before, appeared convinced by his status as the World Cup's best player, president Florentino Pérez's reticence seemingly overcome. He was *exactly* the footballer they needed, someone to get them to actually play, and Real were confident that he would come, that theirs was the only real offer. One headline summed it up: "Rodri is next". This was done, which is when things tend to get undone. Rodri had an offer that was impossible to turn down. Only the terms of the negotiation shifted, doubts growing about Real's commitment, frustration growing.

Barcelona, seeing an opportunity, pushed at an unexpectedly opening door. Rodri might not have been the player they needed most - a forward was their priority - but, well, he's Rodri. This was undeniably a step up in quality, even for a midfield like theirs. Meanwhile, doubts over Frenkie de Jong's fitness brought a reframing: maybe he was more necessary than they had believed. Likewise, that slight nagging doubt about his fit with Pedri in the *seleccion* feels like a small one, easily overcome, certainly no obstacle to bringing together arguably the best two midfielders in the world. Good luck getting the ball off them.

On the day that Real announced Vinícius Júnior had renewed his contract at the club and that they had made Yan Diomande the most expensive signing in their history, they also briefed that Rodri wasn't coming after all. The excitement among fans at the Bernabéu turned to disappointment, a kind of lingering doom. That huge hole in the middle of Madrid's midfield was still not plugged.

For Barcelona this was the signing of the summer. The World Cup winning-captain, perhaps the best player on the planet, was coming. There was a kind of gleeful disbelief, the expectation huge. Rodri thanked Madrid, but he had made his decision. As usual, Jorge Valdano put it best when the €75m deal had been done. "Rodri's deal is worth €35m for what it gives Barcelona and €40m for what it takes away from Madrid," he said. "At Real Madrid he would have revolutionised their play and improved everything."

Valdano added he will not have the impact on Barcelona's style that he would have had on Real's, but that was because it is already his. "I always try to learn from Busquets," said Rodri. "I watched him especially closely: he, and others, laid down a model of playing I knew I had to follow." When Rodri joined City, Guardiola had found his other Busquets, or so it goes. Waiting patiently for his moment, when Busquets finally left the national team, it was always going to be Rodri who stepped in. A "perfect computer", Luis de la Fuente called him. Doing so with Barcelona would seem natural, maybe even overdue, his signing a no-brainer.

Rodri's World Cup overcame any doubts that it was too late, that his time had gone, and brought an extra dimension too, a shift in his role which he didn't just embrace but consciously sought. He had the maturity, the leadership, the ascendancy over Spain's young players - Barcelona's young players - that they needed. And he needed too: there is something almost paternal about him and they had the youth that he *wanted* to lead, to guide. He knows how good it is to play with them: he had done so all summer, wining the ultimate award. And so it was done.

Now all that was needed was for City and Barcelona to reach an agreement. Eventually, they did, so Rodrigo Hernández had another plane to catch.

ROI
HIS
HIS
RODRIGO
2030
FCB

Rodri, who had seemed destined to move to Real Madrid despite their snub of his Balon d'Or ceremony, shows off his Barcelona shirt
QUIQUE GARCÍA/EPA

▲ *Véron Mosengo-Omba says he is ready to 'take a bullet' for Infantino*

Infantino loses Israel's backing but finds solace in an old friend

Matt Hughes
Nick Ames
Ed Aarons

Gianni Infantino endured a mixed day in his battle to remain Fifa president, with the Israel Football Association (IFA) becoming the latest body to withdraw backing but a senior figure in African football declaring he would "take a bullet" for the Swiss and that he had widespread support.

Israel withdrew its support for Infantino's re-election in a letter sent by the head of the IFA, Moshe Zuares. The move is not a surprise as the IFA has been a member of Uefa since 1994 and Zuares sits on the European governing body's executive committee, but it remains another blow to Infantino, who has invested political capital in attempting to improve Israel's sporting relations with Palestine.

At Fifa's congress in April, Infantino tried to stage a photo involving the two delegations in Vancouver but the Palestinian Football Federation president, Jibril Rajoub, refused to stand alongside the IFA vice-president, Basim Sheikh Suliman. Undeterred, Infantino wants Israel and Palestine to compete in the first match of a new under-15 tournament in the US next month.

In his letter, which has been seen by the Guardian, Zuares says recent events have triggered an "unprecedented crisis of confidence" between the visions of Uefa and Fifa when it comes to global governance, adding that the rift is "profound, substantive, and principled, and compelling all stakeholders to reconsider the path forward".

But Véron Mosengo-Omba, who served as Fifa's chief member associations officer until 2021 and is now president of the Congolese Football Federation (Fecofa), backed Infantino to stay on as president, despite saying he was against the now-abandoned Fifa Forward Enterprise plan.

Mosengo-Omba - a close friend of Infantino from their university days in Switzerland - said: "Most of the federations are supporting him. Just ask the congress. I didn't send a letter of support [for Infantino] because I didn't agree with the way the project was done. Now people are trying to attack Gianni but I'm ready to take a bullet for him."

Mosengo-Omba, 66, stepped down as general secretary of the Confederation of African Football in March after reaching the age limit for the role.

▼ *Jordan Cox lines up a catch during England practice at Headingley*
GARETH COPLEY/GETTY IMAGES

Root and Trescothick hope to regain clarity in dysfunction derby

Hosts and tourists united by recent sense of self-sabotage, but England appear closer to rediscovering direction

Ali Martin
Headingley

The history of Test cricket between England and Pakistan stretches back to 1954 and has been a vibrant one over the years. Yet, for all the memorable battles, plus the cultural ties between the two countries and a fair bit of scandal along the way, a trophy that denotes the rivalry is still to be created.

England lost the Crowe-Thorpe trophy to New Zealand this summer, will look to retain the Basil D'Oliveira trophy in South Africa this winter, and hope they can win back the Ashes next year. Trophies for encounters with India and West Indies go back so far they have been retired and replaced by new ones in recent times.

But aside from the Benaud-Qadir trophy, inaugurated when Australia visited in 2022, Test series involving Pakistan simply have whatever cup the sponsor at the time commissions. When England were last in Pakistan, for example, they watched their hosts lift the Bank Alfalah presents Kingdom Valley trophy.

Until something more meaningful is devised, perhaps the series should be known as "El Dysfunctiono". Admittedly it sounds like something Pelé raised awareness about back in the day. But given the two teams involved - both capable of self-sabotage that drives supporters up the wall - it kind of works. That it gets under way at Headingley, home to English cricket's most volatile county, is also fitting.

Marcus Trescothick is standing in as England head coach

Pakistan are at something of a low ebb, frozen out of the top table at the International Cricket Council and one place off the bottom in the World Test Championship after claiming the wooden spoon last time around. Their past 18 Tests have featured 13 defeats, including a record eight in a row away from home - a run only ended this month when they left the Caribbean with a 1-1 series draw.

Underpinning this has been a rolling cast of head coaches and team directors - 11 in the past five years across formats in the men's game, including interims - and they have recently turned back to Babar Azam as Test captain. This despite a battle for form that has seen him go 36 innings without a century. Babar will miss the series opener, however, with a hand injury, forcing Salman Ali Agha to step in.

Things are not much rosier for the hosts. English cricket is comparatively more stable, it must be said, and at the very least, has the ear of Jay Shah, the ICC chair. In contrast to those itchy trigger fingers at the Pakistan Cricket Board, they also tried their best not to rip things up after that dismal Ashes winter.

But in failing to bring about meaningful change, they ended up soundly beaten by New Zealand in June, fell to seventh in the nine-team World Test Championship table, and in an even

First Test

England
Probable
Emilio Gay, Ben Duckett, Jordan Cox, Joe Root (capt), Harry Brook, Dan Lawrence, Jamie Smith (wkt), Gus Atkinson, Jofra Archer, Ollie Robinson, Josh Tongue
Venue
Headingley, Leeds
Start 11am
TV Sky Sports Cricket
Radio BBC 5 Live Extra

Pakistan
Probable
Azan Awais, Imam-ul-Haq, Abdullah Shafique, Shan Masood, Saud Shakeel, Salman Agha (capt), Mohammad Rizwan (wkt), Aamer Jamal, Ali Usman, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Ali
Umpires CB Gaffaney (NZ) and A Paleker (SA)
TV umpire PR Reiffel (Aus)
Referee
JD Middlebrook (Eng)

Weather

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Possible showers Max 19C	Possible showers Max 15C	Sunny intervals Max 16C	Sunny intervals Max 18C	Sunny intervals Max 19C

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bigger mess than before. Ben Stokes jumped ship, Brendon McCullum lost half of his job as head coach, and now a mere semi-reset is only just under way.

Like Pakistan, England have turned back to their princely senior batter to lead, in Joe Root. His first press conference back in the job full-time was much like those that came before: polite, engaging, generous timewise if a touch light on substance. Although Root would sooner comparisons with his first stint were not made, insisting he is a very different person and cricketer to four years ago.

Beyond this, his pride at pulling on the blazer in Yorkshire, and the news that he will swap first slip for mid-off to speak more directly to his bowlers, Root's overriding message was one of refinement rather than overhaul. He wants to lead a team that is more adaptable and nuanced, not wedded to a one-size-fits-all approach. The focus, he stressed, is squarely on these next three Tests.

Doing so without the balance and presence of Stokes makes this trickier, as does the new Test coach, Stephen Fleming, not starting until the winter. The tight turnaround after a month of playing in the Hundred also represents a significant gear shift for England's fast bowlers and demands a significant adjustment from their batters. Pakistan have been playing with a red ball for weeks.

In Root's favour this week is the weather. The seemingly relentless heatwave threatened to make England's intended lack of a frontline spinner look daft, only for clouds to roll in and point to the quicks coming to the fore between showers. That said, this will also make as skilful an operator as Mohammad Abbas a handful.

Either way, the lack of a lofty mission statement from Root was probably for the best. Over on the official PCB website it sets out six "priority areas" to be addressed over the next five years. Amusingly there is no publication date, however, making this a rolling deadline that rather sums up the green half of El Dysfunctiono.

Pakistan lack old wizardry 10 years on from magic summer

Tourists return to England having won just two of their last 13 Test series and had myriad changes of personnel

Taha Hashim

Last Friday was a glorious anniversary for Pakistani cricket, 10 years on from a 10-wicket win against England at the Oval. Younis Khan, their greatest run-scorer, hit a double hundred. Yasir Shah, a magical leggie and Lionel Messi lookalike, took a five-fer. Misbah-ul-Haq, their 42-year-old captain, led his men on a victory lap in south London and would have the ultimate reward a few days later. His side, unable to play at home since 2009 because of an attack on Sri Lanka's team bus, moved up to No 1 in the Test rankings for the first time.

There is a link to that golden period on their current tour of England. Sarfaraz Ahmed, their wicketkeeper back then, is now the Test head coach, but these are much darker times for the national team. Sarfaraz's presence underlines the obscene volatility within Pakistani cricket, a never-ending search for new answers while results inevitably suffer. The number of head coaches/team directors Pakistan have had across formats since 2021 is into double figures, and there's really no point trying to count how many selectors have had a go. Like Joe Root, Babar Azam is back for his second stint as Test captain, having replaced Shan Masood before last month's tour of the Caribbean.

That tour did bring some relief for a unit who have won just two of their last 13 Test series and are second last in the current World Test Championship after finishing bottom in the previous cycle. Victory in the second Test, on a turning pitch exploited by the off-spinner Sajid Khan, ended a run of eight consecutive defeats away from home. Babar – their finest batter, an aesthete who looked as if he was going to be the best on the planet a few years ago – was Pakistan's player of the series with 193 runs, while Masood reached three figures in his first Test knock since losing the armband.

You could see a lineup forming to challenge England's bowlers, yet the luck hasn't gone Pakistan's way. Masood broke a finger while making his century, feeling the wrath of Jayden Seales, while Babar took a blow to the right hand in their warm-up fixture at Beckenham last week, forcing him to retire hurt. After he took some throwdowns in the nets on Monday, Babar's absence from the first Test was confirmed yesterday, with Salman Ali Agha to lead instead.

At least Masood will be around. The left-hander may be short on time in the middle but has been declared fit and knows these surroundings well having captained Yorkshire and done the rounds in county cricket with Leicestershire and Derbyshire, too. Although once an easy nab for Jimmy Anderson, who dismissed him for one on four occasions, he doesn't have to worry about that any more. Abdullah Shafique, also a centurion in the Caribbean, has a technique to get the purists purring and Saud Shakeel is another with a Test average above 40. Both are untested in England at this level but there is pedigree in Pakistan's batting order.

> ***After he took some throwdowns in the nets on Monday, Babar's absence was confirmed yesterday***

The worry is the lack of wizardry in that bowling lineup, one lacking in pace and without a world-beating spinner. The hope is that Mohammad Abbas, 36, can take in all the wisdom he has accrued in the County Championship and nibble the ball around with venom, even if it doesn't reach 80mph. Abbas and England have been here before: he instigated Pakistan's last Test victory in the country, his eight wickets at Lord's in 2018 hurting a Root-led side on the mend from an Ashes mauling in the winter.

Naturally, the cliches will grow louder in the coming days. That Pakistan are forever mercurial, capable of beating anyone when the moment strikes, their bowlers turning electric as the fielders build a drumroll, hauling themselves to a logic-defining triumph.

The reality is that this is the perfect arrangement for Root and an England team short on wins, one on a new path after the fall of the previous regime. They should take the series. Pakistan may well manage one win but a retreat to the past – maybe to highlights from the Oval a decade ago – is a safer shot at happiness for their supporters this summer.

▲ *Abdullah Shafique enjoys his century in the second Test in the West Indies*
RANDY BROOKS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Lawrence brings 'great amount' to England balance

Continued *from back page*

you want to find ways of driving the game forward, but that might look different in different circumstances."

Root will be up against a new Test captain. Babar Azam has been ruled out of the series opener after hurting his right hand in Pakistan's warm-up fixture at Beckenham last week, prompting Salman Ali Agha to take the role at Headingley. It is a major blow for a side who have not won a Test series away from home since 2023.

England are yet to name an XI as they select from a squad that has mostly been in Hundred action over the last few weeks, with Josh Tongue and Gus Atkinson in the Manchester Super Giants side that triumphed on Sunday. Both were present at training on Tuesday, with Jofra Archer, Brydon Carse, Matthew Fisher, Sam Cook and Ollie Robinson the other seam options available to Root.

Dan Lawrence is locked into the side at No 6, in effect replacing Stokes, with Root talking up the 29-year-old's off-spin. "Dan's been an exceptional player for Surrey throughout the whole season. His numbers are amazing. He's played some brilliant innings and is in great form and I think is a very underrated bowler. So he offers a great amount. Clearly it is a different makeup to the team and a different balance to things, but there's no reason why that can't be successful either."

Warner decries media after drink-driving conviction

Tom Wark

The former Australia opener David Warner has lamented global media attention about his drink-driving offence, suggesting it cost him valuable overseas commercial opportunities.

The 39-year-old was convicted and fined $1,500AUD (£787) yesterday for mid-range drink-driving after he tried to switch seats with a passenger when approaching a random breath-testing site on Easter Sunday. The star's barrister argued he should be spared conviction for the offence – when he tested more than twice the legal limit – because he had suffered extra punishment as a result of media coverage.

Awais Ahmad told Waverley Local Court his client's indiscretion had been covered in global outlets including ESPN, Al Jazeera and the Indian Express. Countries including India and Bangladesh, where Warner might be seeking to play in T20 franchise leagues, have an acceptance of a "non-drinking culture", Ahmad said.

"The consequences of his offending are profound," Ahmad said. "Commercial opportunities [are] being affected."

Warner was arrested while he was on an Easter trip home to Australia from the subcontinent, where he captained the Karachi Kings in the Pakistan Super League. When Warner saw the breath-testing site, he stopped and attempted to swap seats with a female passenger, the agreed facts read out in court state. Ahmad questioned the decision of New South Wales police to issue a press release about Warner's arrest given the unremarkable nature of the offence.

"The media onslaught thereafter has been quite profound," the lawyer said. His position as captain of the Sydney Thunder in the domestic Big Bash League was also under threat, Ahmad said.

Judge Clare Farnan said there was evidence of cruel social media commentary directed at Warner and his wife, Candice Warner. But the judge said the need to deter the public from drink-driving was paramount in her decision to convict him. Warner will be able to drive after he applies for an interlock licence and has the device fitted to his car. The interlock will prevent the car from starting if it detects alcohol in his system. **AAP**

▲ *David Warner tried to avoid a test by swapping seats with a passenger*

City's testing transition

Guardiola laid bare in new documentary. Plus: what Rodri can do for Barcelona

Jamie Jackson and Sid Lowe *Pages 40-41 →*

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Sport

Joe Root is trying to juggle the best of Bazball while adding adaptability to the way England play during their Test matches
BRADLEY COLLYER/PA

'It's a big void to fill'

Root sees small changes as best way forward after Stokes

Taha Hashim
Headingley

Joe Root says he is not planning on "ripping up" the work of Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum as England prepare to face Pakistan in the first Test in Leeds today, on the Yorkshireman's return to the captaincy.

The three-match series is the first since the retirement of Stokes from international cricket and the removal of McCullum from his red-ball role.

Root could not escape questions about the former captain and how his side go about replacing him. "It's a big void to fill and someone that's been ever-present for the best part of 15 years, so clearly it's been different," said Root of not having Stokes around. "One thing really important for all of us is we don't get too stuck in the last six months and we don't get too caught up in the next six months.

"We've got a unique series that we find ourselves in, and we've got to be very present throughout the whole of it, and understand the different challenges that Pakistan present us."

Asked whether he can see Stokes returning, Root would not be drawn. "Who knows?" he said. "That's a question for Ben. I just said we need to look after the here and now and that's this series."

Root said he has been in "constant contact" with the incoming Test head coach, Stephen Fleming, who will not take up his position until after the Pakistan series, with Marcus Trescothick filling in for now.

"I don't think there's a huge amount that we need to change. It's small things that will make a big difference. It's not about ripping it up. It's about keeping a lot of the good stuff that we've been doing for a period of time and that Ben and Baz built for a long while, but making small adjustments that in-game will make a big difference.

"I don't believe there is a style, one way of playing Test cricket. I think you've got to be adaptable and you've got to play the situation and the different tempos of the game. It's never the same throughout the five days. There are different challenges and you've got to adjust to the different ebbs and flows of it throughout that period. When you get your opportunity, you want to put teams under pressure and

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Test preview

Both teams can drive fans up the wall

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Bezos-backed group has first refusal to take over Liverpool

Andy Hunter

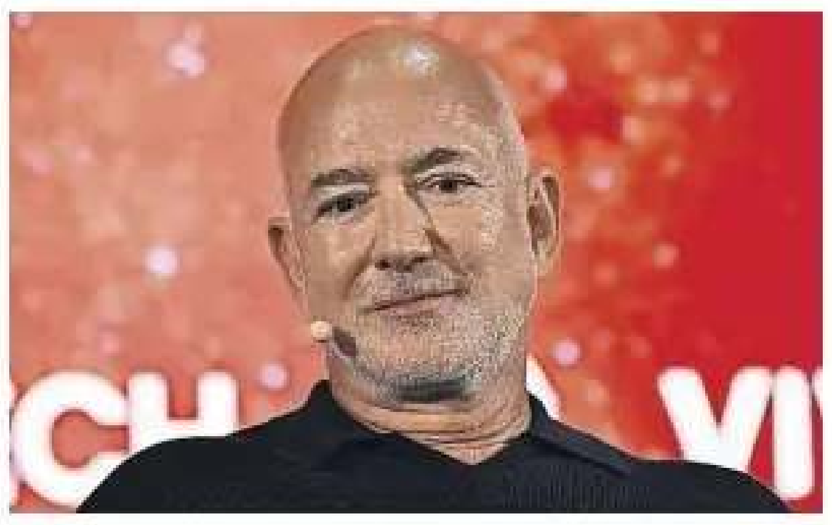
1892 Holdings, the new investor in Liverpool, has first refusal to become the majority shareholder in the next 12 months should Fenway Sports Group decide to sell.

The consortium led by Amit Bhatia and including the Amazon founder Jeff Bezos was believed to have bought 30% to one-third of Liverpool when the deal was announced on Friday. However, the agreement is for 38% of the Anfield club, meaning 1892 has paid FSG just over £2bn to become a minority shareholder. The increased stake still values Liverpool at about £5.5bn.

FSG also insisted on Friday the deal with 1892 was not part of an exit strategy from a club it bought for £300m in 2010 and it was not compelled to sell more of Liverpool to the consortium at a future date. However, should FSG decide to sell or reduce its shareholding in the next 12 months, then 1892 has an agreement in place that gives it the option to buy a controlling stake.

The option could lead to further investment, and is not a formal commitment. FSG remains in operational control of Liverpool. But it does raise the possibility of Bezos, Bhatia and the Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin, another billionaire member of the consortium, replacing FSG as Liverpool's majority shareholders.

Bezos, one of the richest men in the world, is deemed a passive investor in Liverpool, having bought into 1892 through the K5 Sports fund, of which he is the lead investor. Bryan Baum, the co-founder and managing partner of K5 Global, will have a seat on an expanded Liverpool board alongside Bhatia as vice-chair and Elaine Saverin, wife of Eduardo. Bhatia has received financial backing from the Mittal Family Trust to buy into Liverpool. His father-in-law is the Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal. The Mittal family are worth around $17bn and Saverin an estimated $33bn.



▲ *The Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is one of the consortium's members*